

THE FIGHTING COLONEL: RANALD S. MACKENZIE'S
LEADERSHIP ON THE TEXAS FRONTIER

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Military History

by

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ABSTRACT

THE FIGHTING COLONEL: RANALD S. MACKENZIE'S LEADERSHIP ON THE TEXAS FRONTIER by Captain Kyle A. Kivioja, 94 pages

The Texas frontier during the years following the Civil War was a dangerous place. Comanche constantly harassed and raided white settlements. Despite the efforts of President Ulysses S. Grant's Peace Policy, conflict between white settlers and Indians persisted. In February 1871, Civil War veteran Colonel Ranald S. Mackenzie, West Point Class of 1862, assumed command of the 4th US Cavalry Regiment. Throughout the next four years, he led his regiment on a series of campaigns across Texas, which effectively eliminated the Comanche as a serious threat to the frontier settlements. The Comanche, often called the "Lords of the Southern Plains," were some of the most fierce and ruthless Indians on the plains. They posed a major problem for US Army leadership. The Army needed someone who could take the fight to the enemy and establish relative peace and security.

This study examines the most significant factors of Mackenzie's leadership against the Comanche that altered the security environment of the post-Civil War Texas frontier. This study also explores Mackenzie's military tactics and characteristics of the Comanche warrior in three specific Texas battles—the Battle of Blanco Canyon (1871), the Battle of McClellan's Creek (1872), and the Battle of Palo Duro Canyon (1874). Through credible primary and secondary sources, this study demonstrates the utmost significance of Mackenzie's decisions and leadership (however imperfect), the importance of Mackenzie's soldiers and superiors, and concludes with applicable lessons for today's US Army.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The decade following the Civil War offered a new set of challenges for US Army officers and soldiers. For many officers who fought during the Civil War, the end of the war meant settling down to a nice, quiet life after years of intense, bloody fighting. For other officers, however, the post-Civil War years meant heading west to wage a different type of war against a different type of enemy. Graduating at the top of his West Point class in 1862 and once called the “most promising young officer” by General Ulysses S. Grant, Ranald Slidell Mackenzie was one of these officers.

In his book, *U.S. Army Counterinsurgency and Contingency Operations Doctrine 1860-1941*, Andrew J. Birtle calls the post-Civil War years “the Constabulary Years.” He writes that Americans viewed their Army as the “national jack-of-all trades.” In addition to their military duties, soldiers conducted other activities and assumed other roles, such as engineer, laborer, policeman, border guard, explorer, administrator, and governor.¹ Like the most recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Indian Wars in the American West proved to be a harsh, complex environment, which required strong leadership, using a combination of conventional and unconventional tactics to accomplish the US Army’s wide-ranging objectives.

White settlers in Texas throughout the mid-to-late 1800s endured Comanche raids that effectively terrorized the frontier. One raid in particular was the Warren Wagon Train Massacre on May 18, 1871 in Salt Creek Prairie, Texas. A wagon train consisting of ten wagons and 12 men were hauling supplies from Weatherford, Texas to Fort Griffin, Texas when 150 Indians attacked the wagons. The men fought desperately

against the onslaught of Indian charges, but seven men were ultimately killed.² This raid served as the catalyst for General William T. Sherman, Commanding General of the Army, to take decisive action and deploy Colonel Ranald S. Mackenzie and his 4th Cavalry into the Texas plains to bring security to the frontier. Mackenzie and the 4th Cavalry's Texas campaigns against the Comanche offer an interesting study in how a conventional force, using mostly conventional tactics, fought against an unconventional enemy. After the US Army's traumatic experience during the Civil War, one might think the small-scale Indian conflicts in Texas would end quickly. These engagements, however, stretched over several decades. Tough and vast terrain, lack of resources, insufficient Army doctrine and education, interagency difficulties, shifting motives by key military personnel, and a determined enemy were just a few of the many factors contributing to the complicated environment facing Mackenzie and his 4th Cavalry.

Probably the foremost authority on Ranald S. Mackenzie's exploits on the Texas frontier is historian Ernest Wallace (1906 to 1985) from Texas Tech University. Mackenzie had largely gone unnoticed until 1964 when Wallace published his book, *Ranald S. Mackenzie on the Texas Frontier*. Wallace's goal was to tell Mackenzie's largely forgotten story to the American public because he believed Mackenzie had not received the proper recognition that he had deserved. Wallace's book is the foundational secondary source for this study.

Besides a handful of journal articles and essays, the only other major works that have focused on Mackenzie were both written in 1993; Charles M. Robinson III's *Bad Hand: A Biography of General Ranald S. Mackenzie* and Michael D. Pierce's *The Most Promising Young Officer: A Life of Ranald Slidell Mackenzie*. Along with Wallace's

book, these two biographies provide the necessary background information for this thesis. Robinson and Pierce's books discuss Mackenzie's time in Texas but that was not their primary purpose. They focused on Mackenzie's life in its totality. Wallace's book fixates on what Mackenzie did throughout Texas, including his raid into Mexico against the Kickapoo. Wallace touches on Mackenzie's leadership and his engagements against the Comanche, but further analyses of these two topics would be helpful in understanding the frontier Army better and appreciating the challenges Mackenzie faced. This study fills in some of the gaps left by Wallace, Robinson and Pierce by shedding additional light on Mackenzie's leadership abilities, his tactics, and the type of enemy that he faced in the Comanche warrior. Books on the Comanche by T. R. Fehrenbach, William T. Hagan, Douglas V. Meed, and S. C. Gwynne are also helpful in understanding the Comanche way of life.

Unlike General Philip H. Sheridan, Colonel Nelson A. Miles and other famous Indian fighters, Mackenzie did not leave behind a vast amount of writings, mostly because he did not write any memoirs. He died at age 48 from mental health-related issues. Even during his military career though, Mackenzie did not produce a lot of correspondence. His military letters and reports are often short and lacking in specifics. Thankfully, Ernest Wallace collected most of Mackenzie's military correspondence, and his *Ranald S. Mackenzie's Official Correspondence Relating to Texas* is one of the most important primary sources for this study. The other important primary source comes from First Lieutenant Robert G. Carter, who served as Mackenzie's adjutant during Mackenzie's Texas campaigns. Carter's memoir *On the Border with Mackenzie* provides

invaluable insight into Mackenzie's leadership, tactics, and the 4th Cavalry's challenges in Texas.

This study also utilizes primary source material from high-ranking officers such as Grant, Sherman, Sheridan, and Miles who mention Mackenzie in their writings. It also examines some of the first-hand accounts from the enlisted soldiers who fought in the Indian conflicts to get their perspective on the nature of the conflict with the determined Comanche.

While historians have written extensively about the American Indian Wars, analyzing this unique conflict in American history yields valuable insights and truths about warfare that can enlighten today's US military. This study provides a better understanding of the US Army's Indian War experience by focusing on Ranald S. Mackenzie and his presence on the Texas frontier. More specifically, it focuses on three key battles stretching from 1871 to 1874. Chapter 2 analyzes the Battle of Blanco Canyon (1871), chapter 3 examines the Battle of McClellan's Creek (1872), and chapter 4 focuses on one of the key battles during the Red River War, the Battle of Palo Duro Canyon (1874). Chapter 5 summarizes the research and explains the study's conclusions.

The primary research question for this thesis is straightforward. What are the most significant factors of Ranald S. Mackenzie's leadership against the Comanche that altered the security environment on the Texas frontier? Several secondary topics are also examined. These include the US Army's condition and doctrine, the Comanche culture and military tactics, the nature of the Texas frontier, the impact, if any, of Mackenzie's Civil War experience on his Indian fighting career, and the changes, if any, associated with Mackenzie's leadership against the Comanche over a four year period.

Undoubtedly, military operations in Texas tested Mackenzie's leadership. Ultimately, his leadership was the driving and most significant factor in altering the security environment on the Texas frontier. More specifically, the combination of Mackenzie's unrelenting persistence and will, remarkable bravery (causing his troops to tolerate his harsh discipline), and ability to strike with surprise in the heart of the Comanche's uncharted safe-havens broke the Comanche's will to keep fighting. Mackenzie was far from a perfect commander, however, and his leadership was by no means the only significant factor. Courageous and competent subordinates who were with him throughout the Texas campaigns and superiors that maintained confidence in him were also significant to Mackenzie's success. All of these factors had a profound effect on not just Texas' future, but also the future of the entire American frontier.

Background of the US Army during the Plains Indian Wars

For many of the US Army's best leaders, peace did not arrive with the conclusion of the Civil War. As more settlers moved west, they encountered various Indian tribes on the southern plains. Conflict and violence erupted between these two societies as they fought each other for their right to live in the contested region. As the fighting between settler and Indian steadily increased, the US Army found itself in a precarious transition period in which they faced numerous challenges from not only the Comanche, but also the federal government.

The US Government significantly reduced the size of the Army shortly after the Civil War. The Army reduced from several million soldiers to 54,000, which was much larger than the 18,000 in the Army before the war.³ Congress, however, reduced the

Army throughout the next decade to around 30,000, and the War Department maintained just over 15,000 soldiers on the plains. In contrast, approximately 270,000 Indians lived west of the Mississippi River after the Civil War.⁴ Even though not all Indians were combatants, this large number still left an abundance of warriors that the US Army would have to confront.

Approximately 116 Army forts dotted the frontier by 1868, but only a small contingent of troops garrisoned them. Slow promotions, low pay, horrible living conditions, harsh discipline, and contempt from civilians created an atmosphere that deterred most men from serving in uniform. Additionally, the Army lost between 25 and 40 percent of its enlisted soldiers annually because of death, desertion, and discharge. The desertion rate was 32.6 percent in 1871 when Congress reduced soldier's pay, which was high compared to a much lower desertion rate of 6.1 percent in 1891.⁵ In his book, *Frontier Regulars: the United States Army and the Indian, 1866-1891*, Robert M. Utley concluded that these desertions "were incredibly wasteful as well as hurtful to morale, discipline, and efficiency."⁶ The US Government realized that these attrition rates were unacceptable, but politics and competing priorities slowed the rate of positive change.

The inadequate basic training of soldiers resulted in recruits arriving at their operational units with little or no training.⁷ For whatever reason, the regular Army did not intend to use the main recruiting depots at Jefferson Barracks, Missouri, David's Island, New York, Columbus Barracks, Ohio and Newport Barracks, Kentucky, as training centers.⁸ In the 1870s, the Army decided that it would be smart to train new recruits in basic army skills, but the training lasted for only three to four weeks. It was not until 1890 that recruits remained at the depots for at least three months to train before joining

their operational units on the frontier.⁹ Once at their units, the Army's budget limited new soldiers' ability to practice marksmanship by allocating only 10 rounds of ammunition per month.¹⁰ Army leadership also did not view the Indian tribes as a serious national threat, so they supplied soldiers with "leftovers" from the Civil War—uniforms of poor quality and an initial issue lacking necessary items.¹¹ The Indians might kill a few settlers or slow progress on railroad construction, but they did not threaten the large cities on the east coast.¹² Congress tasked the Army with Southern Reconstruction efforts that occupied one third of the Army in the five years after the Civil War.¹³ The US Government and American society wanted desperately to put warfare behind them, but "Uncle Sam" could not ignore the "Indian problem." Western settlement necessitated the Army's active engagement in securing and stabilizing the entire plains region. By any effective measure, the Army's readiness to meet government requirements was substandard. In order to establish frontier security, the Army had to make the most out of a situation filled with insufficient resources and competing priorities.

In addition to dwindling troop numbers, poorly trained recruits, and sparse logistics, the Army also faced an enemy that was superior to them in unconventional warfare. Moreover, shortsightedness by the political and military leaders failed to encourage an overall Indian strategy.¹⁴ Utley observed that most of the US Army's officer corps recognized the Indians' ability to wage successful guerilla-style warfare, but the Army as a whole never established ways to better prepare themselves to face this reality.¹⁵ He writes that US Army leaders viewed the Indians as a "fleeting bother" and were more concerned about the Army's preparation for the next conventional fight than dealing with the current unconventional conflict.¹⁶ Dennis H. Mahan's teachings and

tactics books written by Philip St. George Cooke and Emory Upton provided some guidance, but Army Indian fighters ultimately relied upon their own innovations and experiences.¹⁷ Many officers detested the current Indian policy because it put them in a bad situation. If soldiers killed Indians in response to Indian depredations, the Eastern newspapers chastised the Army, saying they were too cruel. Eastern philanthropists spread the opinion that the teacher, preacher, and social worker could change the Indians' ways through culture and kindness. When the Army failed to respond, however, the western settlers complained that the Army was not doing its job.¹⁸ Western settlers complained because, after all, they were the ones who had to face the Indian danger "up close and personal" on a regular basis.

When he became President of the United States in 1869, Ulysses S. Grant implemented his Indian Peace Policy. In short, Grant's Peace Policy attempted to formalize what had already been going on for years by reformers and policy makers—peacefully concentrate the Indians on reservations and civilize them "through education, Christianity, and agricultural self-support."¹⁹ This Peace Policy had good intentions, but ultimately was a policy destined for failure. The Peace Policy did keep a relative peace with a few tribes and leaders, most notably with the Oglala Lakota Chief Red Cloud. In contrast, the Peace Policy did not have much success at the Fort Sill Agency in Indian Territory (present day Oklahoma). The Kiowa and Comanche fervently resisted the pleas of Indian Agent Lawrie Tatum to abandon their nomadic, warrior ways and settle on the reservation given to them by the benevolent US Government. Utley summed it up perfectly when he wrote, "high-minded theory [was] shattered on hard cultural reality."²⁰ The Kiowa and Comanche refused to farm the land and send their children to the

schoolhouses. Instead, they continued to raid into Texas without consequences. Colonel Benjamin H. Grierson, commander of the 10th Cavalry at Fort Sill, was a firm believer in the Peace Policy; his soldiers did nothing to stop the violence.²¹ Additionally, the soldiers stationed in Texas did not have the authority to follow the marauding Indians onto the reservations and would stop their pursuit at the Red River.²²

It also did not help that when the US Government promised to provide certain necessities to the Indians on the reservations, Congress usually failed to appropriate the right amount of money to fund the programs. The Indians, of course, did not understand the political wrangling in Washington, and this failure only reinforced the idea that the United States was not fulfilling its promises.²³ Fraud and corruption continued throughout the Peace Policy; three Indian Bureau leaders, Ely Parker, Edward P. Smith, and John Q. Smith actually left their position under suspicion of corruption.²⁴ All of these factors combined to undermine Grant's Peace Policy, and Indian raids continued across the Texas plains without an end in sight.

While Washington politics continued to sort itself out regarding Indian policy, it became obvious to everyone that the Army would have to become more involved once again to stop the violence. Sherman and Sheridan concluded that the only way to control the Indians was to attack their villages, no matter where they were located.²⁵ They also decided that attacking the Indians during the winter months would prove the most advantageous. Sheridan writes in his memoirs that the Army would present a defensive posture during the grazing season. But during the winter months, the Army would "fall upon the savages relentlessly, for in that season their ponies would be thin, and weak from lack of food, and in the cold and snow, without strong ponies to transport their

villages and plunder, their movements would be so much impeded that the troops could overtake them.”²⁶ In sum, the government’s belief that it could make nomadic Indian cultures remain on a reservation without problems arising proved fallacious. The US Government demonstrated to the Indian tribes that they could not or would not meet the Indian culture needs; therefore, there was little incentive for the Indians to do what the government wanted them to do.

Background of the Comanche

Comanche culture emphasized a warrior ethos and mobility. The western plains Indians were nomadic hunter-gatherers, superb individual warriors, excellent in tracking, hunting, horsemanship, martial arts, using camouflage, and attacked only when they felt they had the advantage.²⁷ Specifically, the Comanche relied on the millions of American buffalo as the centerpiece for their livelihood. The buffalo was the primary food staple as well as a source of the raw materials the Comanche needed to make their tipis, utensils, and other tools. As the buffalo wandered, so did the Comanche. The Comanche also domesticated the wild horses that Spanish Conquistadores brought to America in the 16th century, which fundamentally transformed their way of life. They went from “bandy-legged and footsore scavengers” to the “most skilled horsemen in North America.”²⁸ The Comanche used their horses to hunt more efficiently and to have an advantage over enemy tribes that might threaten their livelihood.²⁹ When the Army engaged the Comanche in combat, it faced a formidable enemy conditioned for warfare. Comanche boys used bows and arrows at an early age to hunt wild animals. They also learned endurance through foot races and riding their horses. Bravery was such a virtue and sign of prestige in Comanche society that warriors normally fought to the death instead of

surrender.³⁰ The Comanche were not easily defeated in combat. Despite their abilities as warriors, Comanche society still relied on buffalo and horses for their existence and this reliance would prove to be a critical vulnerability. As the Army wrestled with its Indian strategy after the Civil War, Army leadership would eventually adopt a “total war” approach to defeat the Comanche.³¹

In addition to warfare, the Comanche culture also emphasized individual male status. This type of culture made it difficult for Army leadership to study and learn from their enemy because every Comanche warrior acted a little differently. The Comanche had a fluid political structure in which the Comanche judged their warriors primarily on how many ponies they had and the number of enemy they had killed. The Comanche bands were in a perpetual state of flux as individuals came and went for a variety of different reasons. Within the Comanche political system, if a warrior had a stellar war record, earned the respect of others, and showed the tribe that he cared for them, he then had the possibility to head the band.³²

Comanche tactics were similar to modern-day guerrilla warfare, and the frontier US Army commanders spent years figuring out how to combat this style of warfare. T. R. Fehrenbach provides an insightful summary of how the Comanche would normally fight: “[Comanche] warriors would swirl off the ridges in a wide, inverted V-formation, sweeping around them . . . they swerved away from charges . . . [and] never presented a bunched target . . . [when] pressed, the Comanches simply dissolved and vanished into the plains.”³³ Because of the enemy’s tactics and lacking formal doctrine, the Army developed techniques over time that blended conventional with unconventional techniques, stressing offensive action. The Army would drive into Indian Territory and

either force battle or destroy the Indian's food supply and homes. The Army's greatest challenges often times were weather, terrain, and the enemy's elusiveness, rather than actual combat. The Army used Indian guides and scouts to help track other Indians; mobility was the key to catching the highly mobile Comanche. The Army adapted its logistical system using mules instead of wagons.³⁴ The most successful Indian fighters were the ones that employed flexibility, which was not formally taught, but learned through experience and personal initiative. Persistence would also be key in fighting against these elusive warriors.

As the Texas settlers encroached upon Comanche territory starting in the early 1800s, the Comanche's commitment to their way of life was steadfast. The Comanche would not allow the white settlers to have their land without a fight. The settlers may have believed in the concept of Manifest Destiny, but the Comanche hated these new intruders. These new Texans encroached on Comanche lands and continued to drive away the buffalo herds.³⁵ The Comanche bands, along with other tribes that regularly left the Indian Territory, terrorized the Texas frontier because they blamed the Texans for the gradual assault on their nomadic lifestyle.³⁶ Despite the Comanche's frequent attacks, the Army initially took a passive stance and did not aggressively patrol the plains.³⁷

Geographical distance best explains the Army's justification. The killings were not happening in the eastern states' backyard, and did not seem to be an immediate threat as viewed by the settlers who had to face it first-hand. Fehrenbach observed "the panic was very real [but] it was quickly forgotten in retrospect, because only handfuls of mounted Comanches were responsible for all the chaos, and the helplessness of the frontier folk did not fit easily into the Anglo-American self-image."³⁸ Besides, Texas had organized

Texas Ranger militia regiments in the past to help protect the Texas plains. Why could Texas not continue to protect itself or make peace with Indians trying to protect against the threat of westward white expansion?

Comanche warrior society along with a lack of seriousness by the larger US Governmental institutions provided the “perfect storm” in which Texans and other settlers were at the mercy of a terrorizing force that would not quietly go away. The Comanche fought for their way of life by targeting settlers. The US Army was in the middle of the contest and in a very difficult situation. The Comanche were enemies that did not play by the normal rules of warfare, and the government wanted the Army to stop the Indian atrocities. Unfortunately for the Army, the government failed to provide the necessary support to achieve regional security. The only way to solve these types of problems was for a leadership solution; certain Army leaders had to rise to the challenge and accomplish this mission despite significant obstacles.

Background of the Texas Frontier

The Comanche were a real threat to Texas settlers and to other Indian tribes on the frontier. In the years preceding the Civil War and during the war itself, Texas formed its own frontier defense force, the Texas Rangers.³⁹ The Texas Rangers helped drive out numerous Indian tribes, allowing more and more settlers to flood the Texas plains. From 1840 to 1843, when Texas was an independent sovereign country, the Comanche were antagonistic toward Texas because President Mirabeau B. Lamar wanted to rid his country of the Comanche.⁴⁰ In 1846, with Texas now a state and the Mexican War winding down, the US Government sent Indian agents into Texas in order bring peace through non-violent means.⁴¹ The Indian agents in the 1850s wanted to put the Comanche

on reservation land, but no federal land existed in Texas, severely hindering the Indian Agent's efforts. Reservations were finally established from 1856 to 1859, but as white settlers overwhelmed the reservations and the Comanche responded with depredations, Texas removed the reservations.⁴² The settlers' pressure on the Indians was temporarily abated as the Civil War engulfed the country from 1861 to 1865, but the conflict would eventually rear its head once more.

Colonel Jesse H. Leavenworth, United States agent to the Southern Plains tribes, led the formation of the Treaty of the Little Arkansas in 1865, but that treaty ultimately proved ineffective. In return for payments, Kiowa and some Comanche bands agreed to hand over their claim to lands in Texas. Despite good intentions, the US commissioners did not have the authority to mess with state lands, and not all of the Comanche bands were present at the treaty. Additionally, the Indians were unhappy with US Government's ability to provide them with quality goods, and they still viewed the western plains as their home.⁴³

When the Indians determined that the settlements scattered throughout the Texas plains were isolated and undefended, it "provided a temptation too great for restless warriors to resist."⁴⁴ From May 1865 to July 1867, Indians killed, wounded, and carried into captivity hundreds of settlers.⁴⁵ The atrocities they committed, however, seemed insignificant and far away to the politicians and the American public east of the Mississippi. Because of this situation, help to the Texans and other settlers' heading west was a slow process that took several years to develop.

Following Reconstruction, the federal government once again became responsible for the safety of the citizens on the southern plains. The 6th Cavalry had responsibility for

securing Texas, but the leadership did not approach their job with a serious attitude. Colonel S. H. Starr was commander in April 1867 and, instead of taking action against the Comanche, he spent his time reorganizing his regiment to different posts. When Major B. O. Hutchins embarked with some men in July 1867 to respond to 250 Indians raiding near Buffalo Springs, Texas, he spent his time playing poker instead of searching for and punishing the raiders.⁴⁶ By the summer of 1867, the “Indian menace” had become so great that Congress and newspaper editorials discussed how the United States was going to deal with this problem on the southern plains.⁴⁷

On July 20, 1867, Congress established a Peace Commission, whose goal was to “remove the causes of war; secure the frontier settlements and railroad construction; and establish a system for civilizing the tribes.”⁴⁸ According to the Peace Commission’s official report, it believed the United States “had been universally and consistently unjust” when dealing with the Indian tribes.⁴⁹ Because of Washington’s uncertainty, indifference, lack of cooperation, false reports, and “scare stories from the frontier,” the United States Indian policy was failing miserably.⁵⁰ In another effort to resolve the Indian disputes peacefully, the US Government met with the Southern Plains tribes in July 1867 and signed the Treaty of Medicine Lodge near Medicine Lodge, Kansas. This treaty was supposed to curb the violence because, by signing the treaty, the tribes were agreeing to settle on reservations in the established Indian Territory. As Sheridan remembered in his memoirs, the treaty failed almost immediately because many Indians in the tribes did not agree with the concessions and “claimed that most of the signatures had been obtained by misrepresentation and through proffers of certain annuities, and promises of arms and ammunition to be issued in the spring of 1868.”⁵¹ It did not help that when a delegation

of prominent chiefs proposed a council to address grievances, Sheridan refused because “Congress had delegated to the Peace Commission the whole matter of treating with them, and a council might lead only to additional complications.” Sheridan admitted that his refusal resulted in the southern tribes being even more “reckless and defiant.”⁵²

With the failure of the Medicine Lodge Treaty, the settlers once again relied on their own capabilities and the US Army for protection. Clayton K. S. Chun writes that the US Army frontier posts “were key bastions of American military power throughout the West.” These posts were important because they provided security to the surrounding area, acted as a launching pad for offensive operations, and acted as the eyes and ears of the frontier force.⁵³ By the fall of 1869, however, only three major posts guarded the Texas frontier: Fort Concho with 129 men, Fort Griffin with 234 men, and Fort Richardson with 218 men. The average distance between these forts was 85 miles.⁵⁴ Instead of protecting settlers against Indians, the soldiers at these posts had to spend time hunting or growing vegetable gardens for food. Even though the War Department was responsible for supplying the posts, weather, slow transportation, Washington bureaucracy, and other factors created inadequate provisions on the frontier posts.⁵⁵ There were simply not enough forts and troops in Texas to protect the settlers adequately, but the settlers continued to voice their concerns.

Finally, Sherman decided to inspect the Texas frontier himself in 1871. When a survivor of the Warren Wagon Train Massacre, Thomas Brazeal, arrived where Sherman was staying, Sherman realized first-hand that he needed to take greater offensive action to stop the Indian violence.⁵⁶ Based on the US Government’s history of inaction, the Comanche had no reason to think that they should stop living the way they always had.

From the start of the Indian Wars, the Army was at a severe disadvantage and incapable of doing anything significant to stop the Comanche raids. Many wondered, was the security situation irreversible or could the Army reverse the situation on the Texas frontier? The courageous actions of one individual began the movement to a more secure Texas. Because of Brazeal's firsthand account to Sherman, securing the Texas frontier would once again be an Army priority. Texas wanted Army leadership to take their situation seriously and to take the fight to the enemy. In order to achieve regional security, Texas and the US Army could not afford to be reactionary.

Ranald S. Mackenzie's Background

Ranald Slidell Mackenzie had a remarkable Civil War career. He received multiple brevet promotions for bravery and participated in numerous major Civil War battles. By the end of the Civil War, Mackenzie had risen from Second Lieutenant to brevet Major General. He saw his first action at the Second Battle of Bull Run where he received a brevet of First Lieutenant for "gallant and meritorious service" while being wounded in both shoulders. When he talked about the incident with his visiting mother, he made sure to tell her that, despite being shot in the back, he was not running away.⁵⁷ Mackenzie demonstrated his bravery again at the Siege of Petersburg in June 1864. The Army brevetted him to lieutenant colonel in the regular Army for "gallant and meritorious service." Unfortunately, during the siege he lost two fingers on his right hand. Mackenzie, however, did not let this injury keep him out of the war. After taking time to heal, Mackenzie participated in the Shenandoah Valley campaign. His men viewed him as such a stern disciplinarian that they actually plotted to kill him during the next battle but decided not to follow through with their plan after witnessing Mackenzie's

bravery at the Battle of Winchester. Mackenzie suffered a leg wound during the battle, but wrapped his leg with a handkerchief and refused to go to the rear.⁵⁸

Even after receiving a variety of wounds during numerous battles, Mackenzie was undeterred from continuing his service to the Union cause. At the Battle of Cedar Creek in October 1864, he received two wounds and on the same day was appointed Brigadier General of US Volunteers for “gallant and meritorious services” during the Valley Campaign.⁵⁹ At the Battle of Five Forks in April 1865, Mackenzie commanded “with a courage and skill” that warranted “the thanks of the country and the reward of the government.” During a remarkable Civil War career, Mackenzie collected seven brevets and six severe wounds in just three years. Additionally, he had risen to a higher rank than any other man had in his West Point class.⁶⁰ Throughout his career thus far, Mackenzie relied as much on intelligence and careful planning as he did on reckless charges. He also recognized the real risk of injury or death as part of his military career.⁶¹ Thinking about some of his subordinate officers, Ulysses S. Grant wrote the following in his memoirs:

Griffin, Humphreys, and Mackenzie were good corps commanders, but came into that position so near to the close of the war as not to attract public attention. All three served as such, in the last campaign of the armies of the Potomac and the James, which culminated at Appomattox Court House, on the 9th of April, 1865. The sudden collapse of the rebellion monopolized attention to the exclusion of almost everything else. I regarded Mackenzie as the most promising young officer in the army. Graduating at West Point, as he did, during the second year of the war, he had won his way up to the command of a corps before its close. This he did upon his own merit and without influence.⁶²

With a remarkable Civil War record, there is no question that Mackenzie was a brave and capable officer. All of his battle wounds demonstrated that he was fearless and tough in the face of danger. The major question remained; did this Civil War experience prepare Mackenzie to fight Indians in the American West? As a commander in the Civil

War, Mackenzie was a strict disciplinarian. Mackenzie used all sorts of methods to punish his troops. In many ways, he was more of a machine than a human, and he did not care about popularity among his troops. Instead, Mackenzie sought obedience and respect.⁶³ This propensity for sternness, however, did not mean he was completely devoid of empathy.

Mackenzie not only had the ability to control his troops, but also acted decisively to engage the enemy once given orders.⁶⁴ Mackenzie believed that discipline was the key to combat success. One might argue that he punished his men too severely in several instances. By today's standards this may be true, but Mackenzie was not the only officer during the Civil War to deal harshly with his men. One has to remember the quality of troops he commanded and the results he achieved. Mackenzie also led from the front, which enhanced his reputation among his troops.

After the Civil War, Mackenzie reverted to the rank of Captain of Engineers in the regular Army and spent time constructing defenses for Portsmouth Harbor, New Hampshire. He did not stay a captain long as he was offered the opportunity to command the 41st Infantry Regiment. The 41st Infantry Regiment was an all-black regiment, which several other officers had declined to command. Even though black soldiers had performed well during the Civil War, most officials were still not convinced of the capabilities and ability of black regiments to assimilate in the regular army.⁶⁵ Mackenzie demonstrated his leadership abilities on the frontier just as he had during the Civil War. In addition to moving his new regiment from Baton Rouge to the Rio Grande to replace a volunteer regiment that was being disbanded, Mackenzie determined to make his men into a disciplined, fighting organization. He sought to accomplish this by recruiting only

intelligent men and eventually his regiment had one of the lowest desertion rates in the Army.⁶⁶ Mackenzie also dealt with racial prejudice by constantly moving his units between the various frontier posts so there would not be enough time for major incidents to develop.⁶⁷ Wherever they went, the 41st Infantry Regiment endured hostility and racial abuse, but there was not a single substantiated example of violent reprisal by the black soldiers.⁶⁸ Mackenzie's regiment became one of the most disciplined and best units in Texas. When black companies under Mackenzie's command spread out to forts in West Texas, the post surgeon at Fort Concho, Texas remarked that these black soldiers were "decidedly superior" in drill to the white soldiers.⁶⁹

His command of the black infantry regiment demonstrated that Mackenzie was not a commander who settled for "good enough." He always made his troops strive for improvement. He demonstrated that no matter how ineffective a unit might be at the beginning of his command, proper organization, determination, discipline, and leadership could make positive changes. The 41st and 38th Infantry Regiments eventually combined to form the 24th Infantry Regiment, which Mackenzie commanded as well. After Mackenzie commanded the 24th Infantry Regiment, he assumed command of the 4th Cavalry at Fort Concho, Texas on February 25, 1871.

When Mackenzie assumed command of the 4th Cavalry, it was a regiment in which the soldiers spent more time drinking, playing cards, hunting, or being lazy than training or studying their profession. With little pay and no real chance of advancement in rank, the 4th Cavalry soldiers lacked purpose and motivation.⁷⁰ According to Wallace, the type of commander the 4th Cavalry could expect from this battle-hardened thirty-year old was the following:

He was often fretful, irritable, and irascible, the result of a combination of his serious purpose and his suffering from old wounds and inability to relax; that he worked hard and late, slept little, ate moderately, and drank no intoxicants; that he had an indomitable will, unbelievable endurance, and unsurpassed courage. They were to learn also that although he was impatient and impulsive, imperious and impetuous, he could also be chivalrous and courteous, modest and dignified, and that he was at all times loyal and fair, gallant and bold.⁷¹

Unfortunately, Mackenzie did not write much and his official correspondence was sporadic throughout his career.⁷² Never as vocal or as relentless in his ambitions as many of his contemporaries were, Mackenzie did press his personal and professional advantage when the opportunity arose.⁷³ Mackenzie also understood his talent for military command and made sure that his superiors were aware of it.⁷⁴ Colonel Richard Irving Dodge, Sherman's aide, wrote, "talented officers such as Colonel Ranald S. Mackenzie, Fourth Cavalry, clamored for a general's star and deserved it."⁷⁵ While Mackenzie's ambition and egoism may not have rivaled a Nelson A. Miles or George A. Custer, he certainly knew his capabilities and believed that he should be rewarded.

As Mackenzie took command of the 4th Cavalry, Comanche and Kiowa raids were on the rise. On March 19, 1871, the Department of Texas commander, Colonel Joseph J. Reynolds, ordered the 4th Cavalry to replace the 6th Cavalry at Fort Richardson, Texas because the 6th Cavalry had been unsuccessful in stopping these devastating raids.⁷⁶ Fort Richardson was in the northern part of Texas and closer to Indian Territory where many of the Kiowa depredations occurred. Mackenzie issued simple and clear orders. He instructed the 4th Cavalry to stop the Comanche and Kiowa raids and bring security to the Texas frontier. Mackenzie now had his opportunity to show everyone that this Civil War veteran was still a capable fighter.

¹ Andrew Birtle, *U.S. Army Counterinsurgency and Contingency Operations Doctrine 1860-1941* (Washington, DC: US Army Center of Military History, 1998), 55.

² Mildred Mayhall, *Indian Wars of Texas* (Waco: Texian Press, 1965), 70-71.

³ Robert M. Utley, *Frontier Regulars: The United States Army and the Indian 1866-1891* (Lubbock: West Texas Museum Association, 1967), 12.

⁴ Clayton K. S. Chun, *Battle Orders: U.S. Army in the Plains Indian Wars 1865-91* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2004), 5; Birtle, 59.

⁵ Utley, *Frontier Regulars: The United States Army and the Indian 1866-1891*, 23.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Birtle, 59.

⁸ Don Rickey, Jr., *Forty Miles a Day on Beans and Hay: The Enlisted Soldier Fighting the Indian Wars* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963), 33.

⁹ Ibid., 34.

¹⁰ Birtle, 59.

¹¹ Rickey, 34-35.

¹² Chun, 5.

¹³ Richard A. Stewart, ed., *American Military History, Vol. 1, The United States Army and the Forging of a Nation, 1775-1917*, 2nd ed. (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 2009), 310.

¹⁴ Robert Wooster, *The Military and United States Indian Policy 1865-1903* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988), 207.

¹⁵ Robert M. Utley, "Introduction: The Frontier and the American Military Tradition," in *Soldiers West: Biographies from the Military Frontier*, ed. Paul Andrew Hutton (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987), 4.

¹⁶ Ibid., 5.

¹⁷ Birtle, 67.

¹⁸ Ibid., 78.

¹⁹ Robert M. Utley, *The Indian Frontier of the American West 1846-1890* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1984), 132.

²⁰ Ibid., 142.

²¹ Ibid., 142-143.

²² Kimberly S. McCall, "Vindictive Earnestness in Practice: The Campaigns of Ranald S. Mackenzie as a Model of Post-Civil War Indian Policy," *Journal of the West* (July 1995): 68.

²³ Wooster, 77.

²⁴ Utley, *The Frontier of the American West 1846-1890*, 155.

²⁵ McCall, 68.

²⁶ Philip Henry Sheridan, *Personal Memoirs of P. H. Sheridan* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1992), 452.

²⁷ Birtle, 58.

²⁸ Douglas V. Meed, *Warrior: Comanche 1800-1874* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2003), 4.

²⁹ William T. Hagan, *Quanah Parker, Comanche Chief* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993), 7-8.

³⁰ Meed, 8, 14.

³¹ For an in-depth analysis of the origin of the "total war" concept in the United States, read Lance Janda's article, "Shutting the Gates of Mercy: The American Origins of Total War, 1860-1880," *The Journal of Military History* 59, no. 1 (January 1995): 7-26. Janda writes, "The battlefields of the Civil War were classrooms in which American officers learned the tactics they would apply with devastating effect against Native Americans. Faced with an implacable foe on the frontier, the Army completed the evolution of a strategy born of necessity into the dominant doctrine of the era." Janda, 26.

³² Hagan, *Quanah Parker, Comanche Chief*, 9-10.

³³ T. R. Fehrenbach, *Comanches: The Destruction of a People* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1974), 513.

³⁴ Birtle, 60, 66, 70, 73.

³⁵ Hagan, *Quanah Parker, Comanche Chief*, 9.

³⁶ Fehrenbach, 494.

³⁷ Ibid., 495.

³⁸ Ibid., 500.

³⁹ Ernest Wallace, *Ranald S. Mackenzie on the Texas Frontier* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1993), 21. For more background information on the status of the native Texas Indian tribes during the early 1800s, the following article is a great source: Anna Muckleroy, "The Indian Policy of the Republic of Texas," *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 25, no. 4 (April 1922): 229-260.

⁴⁰ Mayhall, 80.

⁴¹ Ibid., 83.

⁴² Ibid., 84.

⁴³ Wallace, *Ranald S. Mackenzie on the Texas Frontier*, 22-23.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 24.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Douglas C. Jones, *The Treaty of Medicine Lodge: the Story of the Great Treaty Council as Told by Eyewitnesses* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1966), 15.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 17.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 196.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Sheridan, 446.

⁵² Ibid., 447.

⁵³ Chun, 48.

⁵⁴ Wallace, *Ranald S. Mackenzie on the Texas Frontier*, 28.

⁵⁵ Chun, 50.

⁵⁶ Wallace, *Ranald S. Mackenzie on the Texas Frontier*, 30.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 7-8.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 9.

- ⁵⁹ Ibid., 10.
- ⁶⁰ Ibid., 11.
- ⁶¹ Michael D. Pierce, *The Most Promising Young Officer: A Life of Ranald Slidell Mackenzie* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993), 48.
- ⁶² Charles M. Robinson III, *Bad Hand: A Biography of General Ranald S. Mackenzie* (Austin: State House Press, 1993), 40.
- ⁶³ Pierce, 36.
- ⁶⁴ Ibid., 43.
- ⁶⁵ Wayne R. Austerman, "Ranald S. Mackenzie and the Early Years on the Border," *Red River Valley Historical Review* 5, no. 4 (1980): 72.
- ⁶⁶ Wallace, *Ranald S. Mackenzie on the Texas Frontier*, 12.
- ⁶⁷ Robinson, *Bad Hand*, 48.
- ⁶⁸ Austerman, 79.
- ⁶⁹ Pierce, 56-57.
- ⁷⁰ Wallace, *Ranald S. Mackenzie on the Texas Frontier*, 14.
- ⁷¹ Ibid., 15.
- ⁷² Pierce, 30.
- ⁷³ Ibid., 50.
- ⁷⁴ Ibid., 65.
- ⁷⁵ Wayne R. Kime, ed., *The Sherman Tour Journals of Colonel Richard Irving Dodge* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2002), 32.
- ⁷⁶ Pierce, 81.

CHAPTER 2
BATTLE OF BLANCO CANYON
(OCTOBER 10, 1871)

Before Mackenzie and his 4th Cavalry embarked on their expedition to find and subdue the Comanche in the fall of 1871, they experienced a disappointing and frustrating summer campaign just a few months earlier. This chapter focuses primarily on the 4th Cavalry's October 1871 campaign around the Blanco Canyon area near present-day Crosbyton, Texas. It is important, however, to have a brief understanding of what Mackenzie and his 4th Cavalry had just experienced during the summer of 1871. In short, the summer campaign's objective was to drive the Kiowa and any other marauding Indians back onto their reservations, especially since the Kiowa were responsible for the Warren Wagon Train Massacre on May 18, 1871. Writing to Sherman that summer, Mackenzie stated, "the Kiowas and Comanches are entirely beyond any control and have been for a long time . . . either these Indians must be punished or they must be allowed to murder and rob at their own discretion."¹

Besides the 4th Cavalry, Grierson and his 10th Cavalry also led an expedition in search of the Indians that had left the reservation in the Indian Territory. Much to Mackenzie's dismay, Sherman was very clear that Mackenzie did not have the authority to cross the Texas boundary into Indian Territory, unless Grierson needed him to support his efforts.² Sherman's policy restricted Mackenzie's actions. Grierson was not noted for serious actions against the Indians. Mackenzie knew that if the Kiowa stayed out of Texas, there was nothing that he could do. Apparently, Sherman allowed the advocates of the Quaker Peace Policy to influence some of his decisions. Politicians in Washington did

not want to see hostile actions against the Indians.³ At that time, the Grant administration had just kicked off the Peace Policy and hoped that the Indian agents, if given time, could pacify the Indians. After spending August 1871 wandering back and forth across the North Fork of the Red River under scorching conditions, Mackenzie and his men finally returned to Fort Griffin, Texas. The 4th Cavalry did not encounter any Indians, thus leaving Mackenzie disappointed. Not only did Mackenzie fail to punish any Indians, but also he later found out that Kicking Bird, one of the Kiowa leaders he sought, actually willingly returned to the reservation. Grierson, always sympathetic to the Indians, had encouraged Kicking Bird to return because he knew what would happen if Mackenzie located that Kiowa band. Mackenzie and his men weathered the harsh Texas conditions for no apparent reason. Mackenzie could have easily thrown a fit about the whole affair, but instead he dutifully continued with preparations for another Indian campaign. Outwardly complaining about missions was not in Mackenzie's nature, unless there was a significant reason.

The 1871 summer expedition across the Red River area exposed Mackenzie and the 4th Cavalry to the reality of harsh summer conditions in Texas. The water sources they found were often contaminated. Mackenzie's adjutant, Lieutenant Robert G. Carter, wrote about one instance where "the water was so perfectly vile and nauseating that one was made sick as soon as it was drank. After a bath in the stream, the body, before one could dress, was at once crusted with gypsum which was removed with difficulty."⁴ Moreover, the 4th had to endure constant storms of rain, high winds, and even hail. The environment was as great a threat to the Army as were the Indians. Northwestern Texas, called the Llano Estacado or Staked Plains, is an area larger than New England and the

largest area of nearly level land in the United States.⁵ Captain Randolph B. Marcy, 5th US Infantry, described the Staked Plains with the following observation in 1852:

Its elevation above the sea is two thousand four hundred and fifty feet at the head of Red River. It is very level, smooth, and firm, and spreads out in every direction as far as the eye can reach, without a tree, shrub, or any other herbage to intercept the vision. The traveler . . . sees nothing but one vast dreary, and monotonous waste of barren solitude. It is an ocean of desert prairie . . . absence of water causes all animals to shun it; even the Indians do not venture to cross it except at two or three points, where they find a few small ponds of water.⁶

The harsh environment of the Texas panhandle during the wars on the Southern Plains was unforgiving. It required the utmost endurance and toughness from those that dared to challenge its cruel reality.

Mackenzie knew that logistics was critical to any success on the Texas plains. Mackenzie brought First Lieutenant Henry W. Lawton from the 24th Infantry to serve as his commissary officer. Lawton was a wise choice because he “was a superb organizer with a talent for getting things done and no patience for red tape.”⁷ Mackenzie’s ability to see promise in young officers, such as Lawton, was a critical feature of his successful leadership. In fact, Lawton did such a good job for the 4th Cavalry that Mackenzie kept him as his Quartermaster for more than a decade. Mackenzie had prepared extensively for the summer expedition. He had some prior experience in Texas, but it could not compensate for the severe terrain challenges. Fortunately, Mackenzie was vigorous and enthusiastic. The harshness of the terrain would not inhibit Mackenzie from completing his mission.

Unfortunately, Mackenzie did have a shortcoming. He sometimes allowed his own toughness to cloud his professional judgment. As an example, Mackenzie refused to let his men deviate from their issued headgear and did not want the men to pack extra

buffalo robes in case of cold weather.⁸ Officers and soldiers often ignored US Army uniform regulations during the Indian Wars, especially during a campaign. It was acceptable during field conditions for officers and soldiers to wear whatever they wanted.⁹ Mackenzie expected his soldiers to embody the same toughness he possessed. His expectation, however, was unrealistic. Many of his soldiers were not Civil War veterans, nor were they willing to embrace the “Spartan” lifestyle as Mackenzie did. Mackenzie believed the extra weight would slow his men down. Speed and mobility were essential to his tactical approach to warfare. While winter wear was not a major concern in August, the 4th Cavalry would suffer the consequences of improper uniforms in the fall campaign when Mackenzie maintained this mindset even with the real possibility of encountering harsh weather.

Also during the summer expedition, Grierson’s failure to communicate with Mackenzie generated frustration. As stated earlier, Grierson apparently knew that Kicking Bird and the rest of the Kiowa whom the US Army wanted to find were on their way back to the Indian Territory in early June. Grierson, however, did not inform Mackenzie. This entire incident involving the Kiowa “destroyed Grierson’s credibility among the officers serving in the Northwest Frontier, and Sherman ultimately had to transfer him elsewhere.”¹⁰ Notwithstanding Grierson’s motives, the lack of timely communication capabilities between cavalry regiments on the southern plains was poor. This poor communication necessitated independent operations and flexible leadership. Even though it was not called what the Army calls Mission Command today, the most successful Indian fighters applied the concept of Mission Command—giving clear commander’s guidance and allowing subordinates to use disciplined initiative based on

mutual trust—to accomplish the mission.¹¹ Mackenzie was the type of commander that probably preferred working independently because he would not have to worry about anyone else holding him back.

Mackenzie's men and horses became increasingly sick and exhausted as August 1871 ended. For Mackenzie, there was no point in staying out in the field looking for Indians. He returned with the regiment back to a base camp at Otter Creek, where Grierson's 10th Cavalry was staying.¹² It was probably a good thing that Grierson had already left to go back to Fort Sill because Mackenzie would probably have had a few choice words for Grierson. Mackenzie was the quintessential mission oriented commander. He did not worry about "luxury" items while in the field environment. This approach contrasted sharply with the 10th Cavalry. The 10th Cavalry officers dined on red cloth, used dishes, sat on comfortable chairs, and regimental soldiers served as waiters. The 4th Cavalry officers were used to using cracker boxes as chairs and eating food off a poncho on the ground.¹³ For Mackenzie, he did not have the time or motivation to make his time in the field more comfortable. He directed all of his energy toward punishing Indians. Mackenzie's time at Otter Creek only further solidified the contrast between the seriousness with which he took his Indian assignment and the focus of some of the other cavalry regiments.

Adding to the contrast was Grierson's fervent belief in the Peace Policy while Mackenzie's default was for a military solution. Once their time with the 10th Cavalry ended, Mackenzie prepared for another expedition. The Quahadi (sometimes spelled Kwahadi) Comanche was the target of this effort. By the early 1870s, there were said to be at least nine bands of Comanche.¹⁴ The Quahadi band was not restricted to any

reservation since they did not participate in the Medicine Lodge Treaty.¹⁵ They not only had no official relations with the United States, but also were the band suspected of raiding throughout the Texas frontier.¹⁶ The Quahadi would rather fight for their way of life than give in to the US Government's demands.

On October 3, 1871, Mackenzie embarked with six hundred soldiers to find the Quahadi Comanche, bring them to the Indian Territory, or kill them if they resisted. Carter rode at the head of the column. Lieutenant Peter M. Boehm commanded the Tonkawa scouts who trotted in advance, combing the area for fresh Comanche signs. The Tonkawa hated the Comanche. As the Comanche migrated onto the Texas plains during the late 17th century, the Comanche pushed the Tonkawa out, causing great conflict between the two tribes. The Tonkawa were only happy to serve as Mackenzie's scouts throughout his time in Texas as a way to kill their enemy. As a precaution against a surprise attack, Mackenzie positioned a small detachment of cavalry between the scouts and the main column.¹⁷ Mackenzie was not afraid to adjust to the way he organized his troops if he thought the change provided him a better advantage against the unpredictable Comanche. While Mackenzie had confidence in his regiment and himself, he also demonstrated that he would not throw caution to the wind. Mackenzie had great respect for the Comanche's fighting abilities. Like other successful Indian fighters, such as George Crook, Mackenzie was also not afraid to use assistance from other Indians. He used all available assets to achieve his objectives.

One incident that demonstrated the unique challenges of Indian warfare was the regiment's encounter with buffalo. Living off the land was one means to enhance the army's mobility. Just as the Indians used the buffalo for food, so did Mackenzie. The

regiment had been in the field for several days. On the night of October 6, a buffalo herd nearly trampled the entire regiment and their horses. Thinking quickly, Carter ordered the guards to move toward the buffalo, waving their blankets and yelling. These actions made the buffalo veer off to the side.¹⁸ This quick reaction against the buffalo was the first of many examples in which Carter demonstrated his invaluable contribution to Mackenzie's regiment. Success on the Texas plains demanded that the army regiments have competent commanders as well as junior officers. Carter recalled in his memoirs that the buffalo event was "a close shave."¹⁹ This "close shave" was not the last time luck determined events during Mackenzie's 1871 campaign against the Comanche.

Mackenzie's troops continued toward Duck Creek and set up a base camp. He then sent out the Tonkawa scouts to find the Comanche. It was Mackenzie's intention, as soon as the scouts returned, to make a night march and surprise the enemy if located.²⁰ Surprising the enemy was important because Mackenzie knew the Comanche would escape an Army attack if alerted of the approaching troops. Unfortunately, the Tonkawa scouts did not return. Mackenzie sent out a detail with Carter in charge to look for them, but the detail returned without finding anything. Mackenzie and his men then proceeded on a night march, but they left their fires burning to give the impression that the entire command was still in camp.²¹ Mackenzie used deception when he could. His trickery did not always work, but Mackenzie tried different tactics to surprise the Indians because the Comanche would most likely flee rather than stay and fight.

With both soldiers and horses exhausted, the 4th Cavalry came upon a small box canyon about midnight. The wall was too steep to scale and the 4th could not find their way out, so Mackenzie quietly had his men bivouac without a fire.²² While most of the

troops rested, Mackenzie sent Captain Edward M. Heyl with a small detachment on a local reconnaissance. Heyl's force finally encountered the Tonkawa scouts as well as four Comanche that had been watching them. The Tonkawa chased the Comanche but were unable to catch them because they were tired and hungry from several days of scouting away from the main element.²³ With the Comanche warriors now gone, Heyl's force along with the Tonkawa scouts rejoined Mackenzie's command. This incident exposes one of the major challenges that US soldiers faced fighting Plains Indians: they were extremely difficult to catch. One tactic Mackenzie used was establishing a base camp and then deploying a small reconnaissance detail. This limited the number of troops and the amount of time involved in locating their enemies. US soldiers in these small details needed tremendous courage. They operated on their own and never knew when they would come upon hostile Indians. Indian warfare was not static. Fighting the Comanche required constant vigilance.

The Tonkawa scouts had located the trail leading to the Quahadi village in Blanco Canyon and Mackenzie and his men promptly moved out. They camped for the night and took precautions to prevent the Comanche from stampeding the herd. Mackenzie had his men tie a rope to the horses' opposite legs and then they secured the rope to pins in the ground. The horses could graze but could not run away. Thinking that measure was good enough, Mackenzie failed to establish enough sentinel outposts, which turned out to be a mistake.²⁴ Without any previous Comanche experience and not having a standing operating procedure, Mackenzie simply underestimated the ability of the Comanche to overcome his defensive measures. About 1:00 a.m., "pandemonium broke loose" as Comanche warriors stampeded the 4th Cavalry's horses by screaming, ringing bells, and

firing into the darkness.²⁵ By stampeding the horses, the Comanche now had the opportunity to capture the soldiers' horses and use them for their own purposes. Stealing horses was usually a primary objective of Comanche raids.²⁶ Carter pointed out in his memoir that the soldiers' very existence in this "far-off wilderness" depended upon their horses.²⁷ If the Comanche could separate the troops from their horses, they would limit the Army's mobility. Interestingly, the same held true for the Comanche—the army's success would hinge upon its ability to take away horses from the Comanche. Carter remembered that after the chaos subsided, "about seventy of our best horses and mules were gone."²⁸

Captain Heyl and Lieutenant W. C. Hemphill's two detachments of cavalry jumped on their steeds and set out to find the missing horses. They suddenly encountered a much stronger force of Comanche. The troops rode into an ambush. Fear paralyzed Heyl, resulting in his inability to command. Recognizing what had happened, Carter immediately took charge and gave the command to dismount, deploy in a line, fire, and retreat back until they reached the security of a nearby ravine.²⁹ Knowing Mackenzie's emphasis on training and his Civil War experience, the 4th Cavalry most likely practiced, at least to some degree, on what tactics to take when encountering an ambush. "We," Carter recalled, "all opened a deliberate and steady fire upon the Indians, who were now moving like a cloud upon us, and evidently intent upon outflanking us, thus cutting off our only hope of the last avenue of escape to the camp, and to finish our small detachment before help could reach [sic] us, their line suddenly recoiled and checked up."³⁰ Remembering their tactics, Carter wrote, the "[Comanche] had no squad, platoon, or company line formations, and no two, three, or four Indians were seen at any time to

come together or bunch. While a general line was maintained at all times, it was always a line of right and left hand circling, individual warriors with varying radii, expanding and contracting into longer or shorter lines, advancing or retreating during these tactical maneuvers.”³¹

Heyl and seven soldiers dashed for safety. In the meantime, Carter and five troopers used continuous fire to halt the Comanche.³² Carter’s challenge was holding off the massed Indians while seeking cover. The courageous Carter directed the men’s fire. Their determination, coupled with the volume of bullets the repeating Spencer carbines expelled, saved the day.³³ Carter earned the Congressional Medal of Honor for his actions. The F Company Commander, Captain Wirt Davis, recalled during the fight, “Lieutenant Carter, while pursuing the Indians who had attacked Captain Heyl’s troop, was badly injured by his horse falling and jamming his leg against a rock.”³⁴ As the Battle of Blanco Canyon demonstrated, Mackenzie was not afraid to send his 4th Cavalry into action when an opportunity arose. The cavalry had to be flexible and ready to pursue at a moment’s notice. If the 4th Cavalry was to have success on the Texas plains, the cavalry had to excel at operating in smaller details. Recognizing that the Civil War principle of massing troops at decisive points would not apply as much out west, Mackenzie did not hesitate to divide his regiment into smaller units to maximize his pursuit of the Comanche. The nature of the Comanche and character of unconventional warfare necessitated a change in mindset that Mackenzie was willing to embrace.

Mackenzie’s approach with the rest of the regiment saved the detachment. The Tonkawa scouts also engaged the Comanche. Carter described the battle: “it was one grand, but rather dangerous, circus. As before stated, an irregular line of battle, or front,

was kept up, always, however, in continual motion, every individual warrior fighting for himself—each, as he came around on the front arc of his right or left hand circle, whooping, or yelling, and brandishing his arms.”³⁵ A Tonkawa and Comanche would both leave the circle, charge at each other, deliver their fire, and then dart back to their places “in the ever-changing battle line.”³⁶ The Comanche then fled up the canyon walls into the bluffs and disappeared. Unfortunately, Mackenzie’s horses were too weak to keep up with the fleeing Indians. The Battle of Blanco Canyon was finally over.

Shortly thereafter, Mackenzie’s scouts discovered a fresh trail. Undeterred, Mackenzie and his men pursued, albeit at a much slower pace.³⁷ Many of the soldiers no longer had horses. Mackenzie decided to send those soldiers back, but he and the mounted portion of his command continued the pursuit. Morale was very low, but Mackenzie did not allow the loss of the horses to hinder his mission to make contact with the Comanche again.³⁸ In the course of the pursuit, Carter spoke to Mackenzie about Heyl’s actions, but Mackenzie did not pursue the matter any further. This reaction exemplified Mackenzie’s complicated nature. For someone who demanded the most out of his men, Mackenzie remained calm when Heyl retreated in the face of the Comanche enemy. Charles M. Robinson suggested that maybe Mackenzie assumed Heyl already felt miserable enough and further punishment would only make things worse.³⁹ The colonel would have removed Captain Heyl if there had been clear evidence, but following his usual habit, he gave Heyl the benefit of the doubt.⁴⁰ Whatever the exact reason, this episode highlights Mackenzie’s loyalty and unpredictable nature. He did not treat every situation in the same or prescribed manner. He also showed compassion for his men by

giving Carter, who was wounded during the battle, the choice of returning to the base camp with the horseless troops. Carter opted to remain with Mackenzie and the regiment.

Deciding that his regiment could catch the fleeing Comanche village, Mackenzie pursued with his usual vigor. As the regiment came closer to the village, Mackenzie realized the Comanche would probably try to stampede his supply train of pack mules. In order to prevent the Comanche from doing this, Mackenzie “closed up the formation and completely boxed in the train with detachments of cavalry.”⁴¹ Regarding the utility of the Tonkawa scouts, Carter wrote, “without our own Indian scouts to beat the Comanches at their own native shrewdness, we would have undoubtedly lost the trail and hopelessly abandoned the task.”⁴² The Comanche were experts at doubling back in their attempts to fool the Tonkawa scouts and troops.

As the troops continued, they noticed the Comanche in the distance and as they got closer, the troops realized that the Comanche were all around them. It was a Comanche ruse. They wanted Mackenzie to chase them and leave the rest of the wagon train vulnerable, but Mackenzie did not take the bait. Carter observed, “Mackenzie determined, upon the advice of the Ton-ka-way chief and our best Indian campaigners, to disregard this wily bait, and keep steadily on, knowing that we must now be very close to them or the Qua-ha-das would not make such warlike demonstrations in the face of our superior force.”⁴³ The Comanche eventually realized that Mackenzie did not intend to leave the main trail. They began to move in, which made the troops prepare for battle. By taking the Tonkawa’s advice, Mackenzie demonstrated his willingness to listen to the advice of others, and not let his pride get in the way of critical decisions. Of course,

Mackenzie also had some recent Comanche experience, and this experience was undoubtedly at the forefront of his thoughts.

The battle, however, did not fully materialize. A winter storm deterred the combatants from fighting. The troops were unfortunately in their summer uniforms, which made the troops miserable.⁴⁴ While cavalry units on the southern plains often lacked sufficient supplies, Mackenzie's troops had winter coats but failed to bring them. Mackenzie's campaign preparations were usually thorough but this incident demonstrated that he and his officers were not perfect and did not think of everything. As mentioned earlier, Mackenzie's emphasis on mobility had its consequences. Once again, the Comanche fled. Mackenzie sent a detachment under Davis to give chase, but the detachment became lost and returned to camp. The storm's severity compelled Mackenzie to cease the pursuit and to encamp. The winter storm had saved the Comanche for now.

Mackenzie kept the men from freezing by ordering that "tarpaulins, robes, and blankets were unpacked to provide shelter and covering during that long, dreadful night."⁴⁵ Mackenzie lacked a winter coat and he almost froze, "but finally someone wrapped a buffalo robe around his almost frozen body."⁴⁶ The next day was beautiful; however, Mackenzie called off the chase. Even though he wanted to catch the Quahadi band, Mackenzie's men were near exhaustion and unable to pursue any further.

After several days, the regiment proceeded back to Blanco Canyon, and then continued on to Fort Griffin. Mackenzie's decision to stop the pursuit of the Comanche on October 12, 1871 was an example of his success as an Indian fighter. Even though Mackenzie knew that the quickest and most assured way to stop the Comanche was to

find them and defeat them in battle, Mackenzie “refused to step over the edge of prudence . . . glory and high rank were not inducement enough for Mackenzie to take the chance. Characteristically, he chose caution rather than reckless abandon.”⁴⁷

Before they arrived at Fort Griffin, the Tonkawa scouts spotted two Comanche who had abandoned their horses. They were hiding in the ravine. Mackenzie ordered Boehm and 15 men to drive them from their cover. When Boehm reacted too slowly, Mackenzie impatiently rode to the front to direct the skirmish, and one of the Comanche warriors shot an arrow into the middle of the colonel’s right thigh.⁴⁸ The soldiers eventually killed the two Comanche, and the Tonkawa Indians scalped them. Mackenzie was not yet ready to abandon the campaign; he felt that the Comanche would return to their favorite camping ground. Mackenzie’s wound made him irritable and ornery and no one wanted to go near him. Thankfully for his men, Mackenzie recognized the tattered state of his regiment and ended the 1871 expedition.⁴⁹ In his official report on November 15, 1871, Mackenzie was brief in his recounting of the battle.

A part of the command had a skirmish with the Indians on 11th [morning of the 10th], on the Fresh water Fork of the Brazos, one soldier being killed,-the loss of the Indians, if any, not being known. The Indians were followed till the 14th when the trail was left at a point supposed by me, about forty miles west of the Head of the Fresh Water Fork of the Brazos. On the return, two Indians were killed, and one soldier wounded.⁵⁰

The US Government, up until this point, viewed Texas as more of a southern state than a western state, which implied that Reconstruction was the top priority. Mackenzie’s 1871 campaigns combined with the events leading up to them showed Sherman that Indians, not ex-Confederates, were the primary security problem in Texas. As a result, Sherman placed Texas under the Military Division of the Missouri, and more specifically,

the Department of Texas. Robinson concluded, “Indians, not Reconstruction, would be the army’s top priority” in Texas.⁵¹

The Battle of Blanco Canyon highlighted an ongoing problem for the US Army in the Texas panhandle. Even though Mackenzie’s 4th Cavalry was now on the offensive against the Comanche, they were still limited on the length of the campaign by their capacity to carry supplies, which was normally about a month’s worth. The 4th Cavalry was always on alert because the soldiers and Indians could stumble upon each other at any time, and the troops had to take advantage of those opportunities to defeat their adversary. Besides other unit’s reports that normally contained information that was outdated, US cavalry units did not have much intelligence before their campaigns. Thankfully for the US Army, the Comanche bands did not have a coordinated grand strategy to defeat the 4th Cavalry. The Comanche’s ability to escape and disappear in the Staked Plains meant, however, that Mackenzie had to be persistent and patient. The conditions on the southern plains were difficult, but Mackenzie knew how to drive his men without breaking them. The ability of Mackenzie’s junior officers to operate independently and courageously in the fall of 1871 bode well for any future campaign, assuming Mackenzie could retain his best officers and soldiers. The issue of retention plagued the Army for many years to come.

Ernest Wallace concluded that the 1871 fall campaign “failed to produce any noteworthy results . . . [but] had penetrated the very heart of the hostile Indian country, even venturing onto the abysmal Llano Estacado in an area hitherto unexplored by the United States military.”⁵² Michael D. Pierce also observed that “Mackenzie and his men had gained valuable experience in dealing with Indians and the terrain . . . his energy and

determination retained the good will of General Sheridan and impressed Sherman.”⁵³

Even though Mackenzie and the 4th Cavalry did not solve the Comanche problem in 1871, Mackenzie did not suffer any serious setbacks. Mackenzie knew that it would take more time to resolve the Comanche problem, and he knew time was on his side. He also knew that various Indian Agents would still promote non-military solutions to the security issues, but Mackenzie was confident that the only viable solution involved military means.

¹ J’Nell L. Pate, *Ranald Slidell Mackenzie: Brave Cavalry Colonel* (Austin: Eakin Press, 1994), 35.

² Ernest Wallace, *Ranald S. Mackenzie’s Official Correspondence Relating to Texas, 1871-1873* (Lubbock: West Texas Museum Association, 1967), 38.

³ Pate, *Ranald Slidell Mackenzie: Brave Cavalry Colonel*, 38-39.

⁴ Robert G. Carter, *On the Border with Mackenzie, Or, Winning West Texas from the Comanches* (Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 2007), 125.

⁵ William H. Leckie, *The Military Conquest of the Southern Plains* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963), 4.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Robinson, *Bad Hand*, 87.

⁸ Ibid., 90.

⁹ Ron Field, *US Infantry in the Indian Wars 1865-91* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2007), 7.

¹⁰ Robinson, *Bad Hand*, 93.

¹¹ According to US Army, Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 6-0, *Mission Command* (Washington, DC: US Army, 2012), Mission Command is defined as “the exercise of authority and direction by the commander using mission orders to enable disciplined initiative within the commander’s intent to empower agile and adaptive leaders in the conduct of unified land operations.”

¹² Ibid., 94-95.

- ¹³ Ibid., 95.
- ¹⁴ William T. Hagan, *United States-Comanche Relations: The Reservation Years* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1976), 8.
- ¹⁵ Robinson, *Bad Hand*, 97.
- ¹⁶ Hagan, *United States-Comanche Relations: The Reservation Years*, 8.
- ¹⁷ Wallace, *Ranald S. Mackenzie on the Texas Frontier*, 46.
- ¹⁸ Ibid., 47.
- ¹⁹ Carter, 161.
- ²⁰ Ibid.
- ²¹ Robinson, *Bad Hand*, 98.
- ²² Wallace, *Ranald S. Mackenzie on the Texas Frontier*, 48.
- ²³ Robinson, *Bad Hand*, 99.
- ²⁴ Wallace, *Ranald S. Mackenzie on the Texas Frontier*, 49.
- ²⁵ Robinson, *Bad Hand*, 99-100.
- ²⁶ Meed, 14.
- ²⁷ Carter, 166.
- ²⁸ Ibid., 167.
- ²⁹ Ibid., 171.
- ³⁰ Ibid., 172.
- ³¹ Ibid., 173.
- ³² Wallace, *Ranald S. Mackenzie on the Texas Frontier*, 50-51.
- ³³ Pierce, 98.
- ³⁴ Wallace, *Ranald S. Mackenzie's Official Correspondence Relating to Texas, 1871-1873*, 43.
- ³⁵ Carter, 179-180.

- ³⁶ Ibid., 180.
- ³⁷ Wallace, *Ranald S. Mackenzie on the Texas Frontier*, 51.
- ³⁸ Robinson, *Bad Hand*, 102.
- ³⁹ Ibid., 103.
- ⁴⁰ Pierce, 99.
- ⁴¹ Wallace, *Ranald S. Mackenzie on the Texas Frontier*, 53.
- ⁴² Carter, 189.
- ⁴³ Ibid., 190.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid., 188.
- ⁴⁵ Wallace, *Ranald S. Mackenzie on the Texas Frontier*, 53.
- ⁴⁶ Ibid.
- ⁴⁷ Pierce, 100-101.
- ⁴⁸ Wallace, *Ranald S. Mackenzie on the Texas Frontier*, 54.
- ⁴⁹ Ibid., 55.
- ⁵⁰ Wallace, *Ranald S. Mackenzie's Official Correspondence Relating to Texas, 1871-1873*, 41-42.
- ⁵¹ Robinson, *Bad Hand*, 107.
- ⁵² Wallace, *Ranald S. Mackenzie on the Texas Frontier*, 56.
- ⁵³ Pierce, 102.

CHAPTER 3
BATTLE OF McCLELLAN'S CREEK
(SEPTEMBER 29, 1872)

Since he was unable to capture or destroy the Quahadi Comanche in 1871, Mackenzie remained frustrated. There was not much time to dwell on these frustrations because Mackenzie had to prepare for the next campaign season. His preparations during winter quarters shed some additional light into Mackenzie's leadership attributes. An Army officer's leadership is not restricted to combat. In fact, in some instances the leadership shown in garrison regarding preparation and training can be the determining factor on whether or not the upcoming battle will be successful.

Indian campaigning, especially in the Texas panhandle, was difficult. One may think that settling down into winter quarters would be a quiet time for Mackenzie, but, in reality, it was quite busy. The Texas forts did not offer much comfort to the soldiers, and there were major disciplinary problems that Mackenzie had to handle. Mackenzie had no tolerance for indiscipline. Ernest Wallace notes the following regarding Mackenzie's discipline:

Mackenzie maintained strict discipline among his men, generally through punitive and corrective measures within prescribed limitations rather than through court martials. Drunkards were subjected to a "dip" in a waterhole or confinement in the orderly room. Obstreperous violators of regulations and insubordinates were put in a "sweatbox," were forced to walk the beat carrying a thirty-pound log, or were spread-eagled on the spare wheel of a caisson.¹

By using local punishments, Mackenzie instilled discipline in his men without losing them through court-martial. He needed these soldiers, regardless of their quality, to get ready for the next campaign.

Desertion was also a major problem, and Mackenzie dealt with it immediately. What was the cause of the desertions? Carter recalled, “both officers and men had been under a terrific high-keyed pressure, a very great mental and physical strain . . . they felt that with the Government at Washington nullifying and rendering most of their hard labor abortive . . . they wanted to see the tangible results or fruits of such terribly hard service.”² Timely action was an important leadership trait that Mackenzie employed in the field and in garrison. Ten of his men deserted on November 29, 1871. Mackenzie dispatched Lieutenants Lawton and Carter with armed details to do whatever was necessary to bring the men back. The lieutenants found the soldiers near Cleburne, Texas and returned them to Fort Richardson where they were most likely confined to the jail. Throughout the rest of the winter and spring of 1872, Mackenzie deployed details to catch deserters. This must have sent a strong message to his men and certainly reminded his men that Mackenzie was serious about his frontier mission. This pursuit of deserters did not stop all desertions but did have some effect. According to the Fort Richardson medical history, the discipline in June 1872 was “very good.” Sometimes he was stern or even severe, but Mackenzie never took it to the extreme and, as a result, the concept of teamwork prevailed among his men.³

Even though Mackenzie certainly did not care if his men liked him or not, he did care about his soldiers. One example that demonstrated Mackenzie’s concern was when a new Second Lieutenant arrived to the 4th Cavalry. John A. McKinney was a promising young officer. When Mackenzie found out McKinney was in debt, Mackenzie paid off his debt personally. When Mackenzie noticed that McKinney started to drink heavily, he

had Carter pay special attention to him and mentor him.⁴ This instance serves as another example of Mackenzie's complex leadership style.

Additionally, Mackenzie never allowed himself to "cross over the line." Mackenzie was a reasonable man and while he maintained high standards, he was willing to give his men the benefit of the doubt, just as he did with Captain Heyl during the fall 1871 campaign. Carter observed, "Mackenzie was not a West Point martinet . . . he never sought to inflict an injury or punishment upon anybody unnecessarily, never became a petty or malicious persecutor, hounding a man into his grave." Carter also remarked that "when it became evident to him as well as to others that he had done any of his officers or men an act of injustice, nobody could have been more open, free and frank in his disavowal of that act, or quicker to apologize and render all the reparation possible in his power."⁵

Another significant event took place during the winter of 1872 revealed Mackenzie's character. Mackenzie had charged the Department of Texas Commander, Colonel Joseph J. Reynolds, with fraudulent practices. Evidence suggested that Reynolds had paid several men the full price of corn that failed to meet the contract's specifications. Moreover, other contractors never delivered required supplies to Fort Richardson.⁶ In preparation for the upcoming Indian expedition, Mackenzie ordered supplies from another contractor instead of the sources that Reynolds wanted Mackenzie to use.

In retaliation for disobeying his orders, Reynolds wanted Mackenzie court-martialed. He sent the proceedings to General Sheridan, who in turn forwarded the papers to Secretary of War W. W. Belknap. Belknap then referred the charges to the Judge

Advocate General who subsequently dropped the charges against Mackenzie. The judge evidently believed there was insufficient evidence and the case was “clearly not expedient to prosecute.”⁷ Interestingly, Belknap later resigned under charges of corruption.⁸ The unreliability of Reynolds’s contractors was certainly a concern for Mackenzie. He was wise not to deal with the unscrupulous contractors, but he took a huge risk in doing so. The fearlessness against Reynolds showed Mackenzie was not afraid to go against superiors whom he thought was in the wrong. In this case, Mackenzie’s integrity and pragmatism paid off.

Sherman and Sheridan replaced Reynolds with Brigadier General Christopher C. Augur, who was more willing to support Mackenzie.⁹ When Augur became the Department of Texas Commander in January 1872, the War Department directed him to punish the Comanche and Kiowa who continued their bold depredations across the Texas plains. Augur would eventually send a message to all of his subordinates that they were accountable for their actions against the Indians; “formal” pursuits of a few days were no longer acceptable.¹⁰ There had to be a concerted, sustainable effort to deal with this deteriorating security situation.

As the winter slowly turned to spring in 1872, hostilities against the settlers along the Texas plains increased. The northernmost settlements shared a border with the Staked Plains and Indian Territory. Augur recognized that the Indians were using the Staked Plains as their refuge and the only way that these settlers were going to have peace was for the Army to continue hunting the recalcitrant Indians, even if it meant campaigning into the Staked Plains. Cattle thieves also complicated the situation. These cattle thieves were linked with the hostile Indians. Traders furnished Comancheros, Hispanic New

Mexico traders, with goods to trade to hostile Indians. The Indians would raid into Texas, steal cattle, and trade them to the Comancheros, who in turn would return to New Mexico and sell the cattle. On March 28, 1872, a detachment of 4th Cavalry captured some of these thieves. After interrogation, Mackenzie discovered that these marauders had used trails that allowed them to journey through the Staked Plains.¹¹ This was important because, up until this point, the general thought was the Staked Plains was uninhabitable. This information proved what Mackenzie had already suspected.¹² In April and May, a detachment of one hundred men under Captain Napoleon B. McLaughlin verified the marauder's information.

After calling together a council of war in San Antonio, Brigadier General Augur ordered Mackenzie to establish a camp either on the Colorado or on the Fresh Fork of the Brazos and then scout for the Indians so they could find them, drive them, and finally end the raids.¹³ These raids were certainly a real threat as the attack on Abel Lee only 16 miles from Fort Griffin exemplified.¹⁴ The Comanche killed Mr. Lee, his wife, and one of his daughters; the Comanche took the three other daughters into captivity.¹⁵ The lead Indian agent, Lawrie Tatum, made it clear from his headquarters at the Fort Sill Agency that the Indians were getting out of control, and he needed the Army's help. The Quahadi were the main culprits, but there were also Kiowa and members of Mow-way's band of Comanche involved. Mackenzie now had the opportunity to bring the Indians to account for all of the previous raids and massacres. Mackenzie did not waste any time in preparing for the expedition.

Mackenzie decided to set up his supply camp on the Fresh Fork of the Brazos. Similar to other campaigns during this period, infantry support came from the other

Texas posts. Lieutenant Colonel William R. Shafter supported this summer expedition from Fort McKavett with three companies of the 24th Infantry, and the main supplies came from Fort Concho.¹⁶ On July 6, Shafter's contingent finally reached Mackenzie's supply camp. Mackenzie acquired his supplies from Fort Griffin instead of Fort Concho due to time constraints. Mackenzie demonstrated that he would waste no effort in expediting his preparation timeline.¹⁷ The planning guidance given to Mackenzie by the Department of Texas Headquarters discussed the troops taking only the necessities, extra shoes, 200 rounds of ammunition per man, and that ambulances should accompany each column.¹⁸ Most everything else was left up to the "Fighting Colonel."

Before Mackenzie actually engaged the Comanche at the Battle of Blanco Canyon the previous year, he spent many days in the Staked Plains' harsh terrain. In that environment, he gained a better appreciation for the nature of Comanche territory. This new summer campaign was important because it demonstrated Mackenzie's relentless perseverance; he did not allow the Staked Plains' daunting nature to hinder his effort to find the Comanche and destroy them in battle. To ensure 4th Cavalry success, he needed reliable logistics to survive and succeed.

While waiting for Shafter to arrive from Fort McKavett, Mackenzie demonstrated his natural impatience by sending some of his men to scout. Mackenzie did scouting on his own. Mackenzie sent McLaughlin and Captain John Lee to reconnoiter the Muchaque country. They started on July 2, and after marching several days they located an Indian trail. They followed it but after traveling for thirty hours without water, they returned to the supply camp. Overall, they had marched 294 miles in 13 days.¹⁹ While Mackenzie's discipline and training were sometimes harsh, this campaign revealed the

training benefits. Mackenzie's men were "toughened," and they pushed themselves beyond normal expectations in very inhospitable terrain.

Mackenzie once again demonstrated his willingness to trust his subordinates. While McLaughlin and Lee were out scouting, Mackenzie took a larger force and made a reconnaissance toward the Red River. Mackenzie left on July 9 and, when his element returned to the Freshwater Fork camp on July 19, they had traveled 208 miles. However, they had not encountered a single Comanche. Despite the lack of contact, this relatively short expedition was significant because it narrowed down the Comanche village's location. It was most likely on the North Fork of the Red River or on the Palo Duro Creek.²⁰ It also validated what Polonis Ortiz, a captured Comanchero familiar with the area and Comanche habits, had already told them. Mackenzie used available intelligence, in this case Ortiz, but he was also skeptical. Mackenzie wanted to verify the information if he could. While Mackenzie was out on his expedition, Shafter finally arrived. When Mackenzie returned, he began to make further preparations to venture out once again and explore the Llano Estacado.

Wisely, Mackenzie took Ortiz with him. Even though the US army had never ventured into this area before, he knew that Indians and Comancheros had.²¹ If Indians and cattle thieves could survive the plains, then his 4th Cavalry could survive as well. Within a month, Mackenzie had crossed the Staked Plains not once but twice. The only interaction with Indians was when they saw some Indians in the distance, but his Tonkawa scouts said that it was a small party away from the main village. Mackenzie did send a detachment to investigate, but decided that his main element would not pursue.²² Mackenzie once again demonstrated that he was not rash; his ultimate goal was to find

and bring to battle the entire Comanche village, not chase every Comanche all over the prairie. Mackenzie listened to his Indian scouts and was not too proud to take advice from others.

Even though Mackenzie did not find any Comanche village, his summer expedition across the Staked Plains was significant. The information yielded during this summer campaign was helpful. It provided valuable intelligence regarding what to expect when encountering the Staked Plains. Most important, the Army could penetrate and survive this inhospitable region. In his annual report, General Augur wrote, “this is the first instance, within my knowledge, where troops have been successfully taken across the Staked Plains. This fact, that troops can be so moved, and the general knowledge of the country, and the specific knowledge of the routes and *modus operandi* of the cattle thieves . . . I regard as very important, and well worth the summer’s labor.”²³

Mackenzie’s experience would come in handy two years later when the Army finally attempted to end the Comanche threat during the Red River War in 1874.

The upcoming Battle of McClellan’s Creek was a “manifestation” of how the Army was going “to wield its punitive sword.”²⁴ After spending August resting and resupplying his men and horses, Mackenzie informed his higher command that he would lead another expedition to find the Comanche village. While Mackenzie undoubtedly understood the importance of the information he gained through his summer campaign, he wanted to obtain the ultimate prize. When he left on this fall expedition on September 21, he had five companies of the 4th Cavalry, Company I, 24th Infantry, an engineer officer, and two assistant surgeons. The total was 12 officers and 272 enlisted men, along with his Tonkawa scouts, a Fort Richardson post guide, and the prisoner Ortiz.²⁵

After about a week, Mackenzie decided to leave his supplies with a guard to watch them on a stream just north of the Salt Fork. He proceeded with seven officers, 215 enlisted men and nine Tonkawa scouts under the command of Lieutenant Boehm.²⁶ After finding and then losing several fresh trails, Captain Wirt Davis noticed some tracks and scattered grapes. He ultimately concluded that the Comanche had recently gathered the grapes and used a mule to bring the grapes back to the village. Mackenzie acknowledged Davis' analysis and he immediately set out with his command to follow this new trail. Suddenly, Mackenzie and his men came upon a large Indian village on the south side of the North Fork of the Red River, about seven miles from its junction with McClellan Creek. It was indeed a Comanche village, actually the largest of several Quahadi and Kotsoteka camps in the vicinity. This village chief was Mow-way but he was away pursuing peace talks with the government. This village was under the leadership of Kai-wotche.²⁷

Mackenzie understood that he had to take advantage of this opportunity. He arranged his men into columns of four and decided to use surprise to bring a striking blow to this village. The only tactic that made sense was a frontal cavalry charge. Before they charged, however, Mackenzie made sure to rest his men. He understood that even though they held the element of surprise, it was still going to be a tough fight, and his troops needed all the energy they could muster. As the troops got closer, the Comanche realized what was happening and began to scatter. Some ran for the horses, some tried to hide, and others grabbed their weapons to try to defend the village.²⁸ The Comanche did not have a specific, coordinated plan in case they were surprised. The Comanche's

natural habit in this instance was to react independently to the cavalry charge, which was usually a fateful decision.

It was about 4:00 p.m. when Mackenzie's expedition charged into the heart of the Comanche village. Three companies commanded by Davis, Captain Eugene Beaumont and Captain Theodore Wint charged into the main village. Mackenzie sent Lee's D Company after the Comanche's horses and McLaughlin's I Company attacked a set of Comanche lodges detached from the main encampment. The Comanche that had reached for their weapons, resisted, and killed four of the troops. Overall, the battle only lasted about 30 minutes. After the "brisk" fight, Mackenzie was not going to let any of the Comanche escape. He sent Beaumont's A Company in pursuit. Approximately 75 to 80 warriors resisted. The Comanche twice charged the soldiers, but the troops expended a heavy enough fire to repel the attack and inflicted some heavy losses on the group of Comanche. Mackenzie also sent some of his men to head off the escaping Indians. Unfortunately, it was too late and some of the Comanche escaped.

When it was over, Mackenzie and the 4th Cavalry secured an important victory. They killed approximately 50 Indians and wounded an undetermined amount. The troops captured about 800 Indian ponies as well as 130 women and children. Mackenzie ordered his men to destroy everything except a few choice robes. When the fires had finished, they had destroyed over 250 lodges along with all of the Comanche's stored meat for the winter. Of Mackenzie's men, the Comanche inflicted three casualties on F Company and seriously wounded Corporal Henry A. McMasters of A Company. The Comanche additionally killed or injured ten cavalry horses during the attack.²⁹

Typical of the Army's experience against the Comanche, the "official" battle was over but that was not the end of the troops and Comanche engagement with each other. After the command moved a few miles from the burned village, they made camp. Mackenzie left the Indian ponies under the guard of Boehm and his Tonkawa scouts, which turned out to be a mistake. Boehm and his scouts felt so secure that they went to sleep. Some Comanche warriors found the camp and decided to recapture their horses. Boehm and his men were at first able to defend against the Comanche as they encircled the camp, shouting and trying to stampede the horses. When their tactic did not work, the Comanche left. The Comanche returned at midnight, however, and made several dashes close enough to the horses to stampede them and drive them away. The Comanche also captured some Tonkawa horses as well. After the Comanche regained most of their horses, Boehm and his men returned to the main part of camp. Mackenzie was undoubtedly displeased. The 4th Cavalry then rejoined their supply train and journeyed back east toward their home forts.

Even though the casualty numbers were miniscule compared to Civil War battles and even smaller than other frontier battles, the battle of McClellan's Creek was significant because Mackenzie now had the victory he needed to affirm that his exhausting campaign was worthwhile. In fact, within a week after the battle, Quahadi Chief Para-o-coom, whose tribe was a short distance away from Mow-way, decided to bring his band to the Fort Sill area and told Agent Tatum they were ready to remain on the reservation.³⁰ Through this victory, Mackenzie's relentless pursuit of the Comanche paid off. US Army soldiers were also no longer afraid to venture into the Staked Plains.

This battle was significant because it destroyed most of the Comanche winter supplies, and the Army used the Indian prisoners as bargaining tools to exchange for white prisoners held by the Comanche. In his report of the battle, Mackenzie confirms that some of their Indian prisoners were Comanche who had most likely raided Texas settlements before. Mackenzie wrote, “[Ortiz] states that he recognizes the majority of the Indians now prisoners in our hands as a part of the band of Comanche Indians who last year wintered in that part of Texas known as Mucha Que.”³¹ The army made mistakes of course, namely the Comanche’s recapture of the horses after the battle. From his experience the previous year, Mackenzie should have put more emphasis on keeping the captured horses secured. He would finally learn this lesson during the Red River War several years later.

Mackenzie’s campaign against the Comanche during the summer and fall of 1872 was not a result of spectacular genius. Mackenzie did not mastermind an amazing military feat, à la Napoleon, to defeat the Comanche. Mackenzie’s victory at McClellan’s Creek was an example of the eventual fruits of sheer determination, relentless motivation, and adapting to the operating environment in his pursuit of the enemy. McClellan’s Creek was typical of Plains Indian warfare. The battle’s numbers were not spectacular, but each skirmish, no matter how small, was important because of the harsh terrain and difficulty in bringing the Comanche to battle. Mackenzie’s harsh leadership style also was well suited to plains warfare because the long exhausting campaigns demanded toughness. Despite his newfound success, Mackenzie would have yet another opportunity to face this tough enemy on the battlefield.

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- ¹ Wallace, *Ranald S. Mackenzie on the Texas Frontier*, 61.
- ² Carter, 219-220.
- ³ Wallace, *Ranald S. Mackenzie on the Texas Frontier*, 61-62.
- ⁴ Robinson, *Bad Hand*, 110.
- ⁵ Carter, 218-219.
- ⁶ Wallace, *Ranald S. Mackenzie on the Texas Frontier*, 62.
- ⁷ Pierce, 107.
- ⁸ Wallace, *Ranald S. Mackenzie on the Texas Frontier*, 63.
- ⁹ Ibid., 64.
- ¹⁰ McCall, 70.
- ¹¹ Robinson, *Bad Hand*, 113.
- ¹² Ibid., 114.
- ¹³ Ibid., 115.
- ¹⁴ Carter, 376.
- ¹⁵ Robinson, *Bad Hand*, 116.
- ¹⁶ Ibid., 115.
- ¹⁷ Ibid., 117.
- ¹⁸ Wallace, *Ranald S. Mackenzie's Official Correspondence Relating to Texas, 1871-1873*, 72.
- ¹⁹ Wallace, *Ranald S. Mackenzie on the Texas Frontier*, 67.
- ²⁰ Ibid., 68.
- ²¹ Ibid., 72.
- ²² Ibid., 73.
- ²³ Wallace, *Ranald S. Mackenzie's Official Correspondence Relating to Texas, 1871-1873*, 139.

²⁴ McCall, 70.

²⁵ Wallace, *Ranald S. Mackenzie on the Texas Frontier*, 78.

²⁶ Ibid., 79.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid., 80.

²⁹ Ibid., 81.

³⁰ Ibid., 87.

³¹ Wallace, *Ranald S. Mackenzie's Official Correspondence Relating to Texas, 1871-1873*, 144.

CHAPTER 4
BATTLE OF PALO DURO CANYON
(SEPTEMBER 28, 1874)

Mackenzie's victory at McClellan's Creek against the Comanche was a devastating blow to the "Lords of the Southern Plains," but it was not the last encounter between the 4th Cavalry and the Comanche. In fact, a final showdown had to occur before hostilities would ultimately cease. Before Mackenzie concluded his several year fight against the Comanche, southern Texas experienced a significant increase in Mexican Kickapoo raids. With Mexico as a safe-haven, the Kickapoo raided with impunity and the Texas settlers were victims of constant robbery, terror, rape and murder. There were not enough Texas Rangers to deter or defeat this fierce enemy.¹ Because of Mackenzie's record against the Comanche, General Sherman decided that Mackenzie and his 4th Cavalry were the perfect combination to deal with the Kickapoo, even if it meant crossing the US-Mexican border.

Because of this 1873 Kickapoo crisis, Mackenzie had to handle the problem near Mexico instead of finalizing his expeditions against the Comanche. While this might have been frustrating, Mackenzie did not complain outwardly about the new mission but determined that he would make the most of his opportunity. Mackenzie's most noted action against the Mexican Kickapoo occurred in 1873 at the Battle of Remolino. This battle was a daring raid into Mexico and displayed amazing bravery and endurance. The 4th Cavalry travelled more than 160 miles in 49 hours and destroyed three Indian villages.² Mackenzie's raiders killed 19 warriors, captured numerous women and children, and returned to Fort Clark, Texas before the Mexican Government had time to

react.³ Because of Mackenzie's actions, depredations against the settlers along the border ceased for several years. Mackenzie's achievement further enhanced his reputation as a successful commander. There was no reason to assign him outside of Texas.

After Mackenzie's 1872 campaign against the Comanche, the Texas panhandle remained calm throughout the winter months. The Indians settled into their winter camps. Mackenzie's success motivated the Comanche to think about how much or if they wanted to continue the fight against the US Government.

As 1873 progressed, several factors created a situation that required the US Army to conduct a large-scale campaign to subjugate the Southern Plains tribes. One of the major reasons revolved around the buffalo. As previously mentioned, the buffalo was essential to the survival of the Indian people. Unfortunately for the Plains Indians, buffalo hunters had destroyed bison herds across the plains and as far south as the Canadian River in the Texas Panhandle.⁴ Because of this reality, "the Indians had lost control over what had been the territory given them at Medicine Lodge, and they began to panic over the juggernaut of buffalo hunters who were rapidly destroying their very means of survival."⁵

Even though the Southern Plains Indians kept to their tribes, they also communicated with each other. As the white settlers continued to spread west, the Indians understood that each tribe's actions could affect each other. During this period, the Kiowa were getting restless because the US Government was slow to release the Kiowa war chiefs Satanta and Big Chief. They had been captured several years earlier and were being held in Huntsville, Texas. As was often the case during the Plains Indian Wars, American politics continued to play a significant role. This role complicated an

already difficult situation. The Indians once again saw that the US Government and the Texas state government were not fulfilling their promises and agreements. Pressured by public opinion, Texas Governor Edmund J. Davis released the prisoners but wanted the Indians to do something for Texas in return. He wanted the Comanche to turn in some of their own that were guilty of past hostilities. The Bureau of Indian Affairs approved this agreement, but a problem remained. The five wanted Indians were nowhere to be found and, despite multiple raids, they remained at large. The US Government instructed the Indian agent to withhold the Indians supplies until they found the missing warriors. The Quakers intervened and, because of their mediation, the Indians received their supplies as long as they returned the stolen goods. Ernest Wallace concluded, “this retreat from a firm position, construed as a sign of fear or weakness, encouraged the Comanches again to take the warpath, and soon several raiding parties defiantly set out to plunder the frontier settlements of Texas and northern Mexico.”⁶

Along with the growing buffalo decimation and the Comanche perception that the US Army was not going to challenge them, the Comanche remained a warrior culture and the young men still wanted to prove themselves. There was also a general sense among the plains tribes that their way of life was slowly disappearing, and the Comanche were not going to let that happen without a fight. By the spring of 1874, the tenuous situation between the white and Indian cultures was about to fracture. On the lips of the Indians, there was constant talk of killing the white man and driving them from their land forever.⁷

Just as the Warren Wagon Train Massacre in 1871 spurred the Army to strike back against the depredations of the Southern Plains Indians, the Second Battle of Adobe

Walls in 1874 was the catalyst for the Army's campaign to punish the Indians who still refused to go to the Indian Territory and, once there, remain on those lands. On June 27, 1874, around 200 Quahadi Comanche and Cheyenne, led by Quanah Parker, attacked the Adobe Walls post that 28 men and one woman occupied. The Indians attacked, but most of the hunters were good shooters and repelled the attack. Several Comanche were killed in the mayhem. When it was over, the Comanche had only killed three hunters. Even though the Comanche attack failed to kill more of the settlers and it did not completely stop white hunters from killing buffalo, word of the attack spread throughout the Great Plains. Because of this attack, many of the white settlers and hunters moved back east.

Why did the Comanche attack at Adobe Walls, Texas? Mildred Mayhall suggested many reasons, but the most important reason was "the Indians despised the hunters who were exterminating the buffalo which was the Indian's main food supply."⁸ Another reason for the Comanche attack was the emergence of a Quahadi Comanche named Isatia. He convinced the Comanche that he could not be killed by the white man's bullets and that he could bring the dead back to life.⁹ The Comanche warriors believed Isatia had great power. Given the Comanche's desperate situation, they decided that they had to strike against the white settlers. With the current Quahadi war chief, Para-o-coom, near death, Isatai and the young Quanah Parker assumed the leadership of the Quahadi Comanche war party and planned to make a statement at Adobe Walls.

The Adobe Walls engagement was not much of a success for the Comanche. The Comanche, Cheyenne, and Kiowa, however, were not going to stop fighting for their way of life. Throughout the summer of 1874, these tribes plundered settlements throughout the plains, killing over 190 people and capturing numerous white settlers.¹⁰ These raids

caused enough devastation to generate another campaign against them. This campaign would be the final confrontation against the Comanche, and it became known as the Red River War. Primarily occurring around the Red River in the panhandles of Texas and Oklahoma, the Red River War would be marked by over one hundred battles from August 1874 to its conclusion in June 1875.¹¹

Unlike many plains battles leading up to this point, the Red River campaign featured greater numbers of troops. Because of Mackenzie's success against the Comanche and his previous experience in the Texas panhandle, it made sense for Mackenzie to lead his 4th Cavalry northwest to engage the marauding Indians. A major difference now was that Sheridan conferred with Major General John Pope, Department of the Missouri commander, and asked for additional troops. Moving from Fort Dodge, Kansas, Pope sent Colonel Nelson A. Miles, with eight companies of 6th Cavalry and four companies from the 5th Infantry, to operate southward toward the Indian Territory. Leaving from Fort Union, New Mexico, Major William R. Price led four companies of the 8th Cavalry eastward across the Texas panhandle. From the Department of Texas, Lieutenant Colonel John W. Davidson marched from Fort Sill with eight companies of the 11th Infantry, and Lieutenant Colonel George P. Buell moved northwest from Fort Griffin with seven companies of the 9th Cavalry, two from the 10th Cavalry, and two from the 11th Infantry. Last and certainly not least were Mackenzie and his 4th Cavalry. Mackenzie commanded eight companies from the 4th Cavalry and five companies from the 10th and 11th Infantry from Fort Concho. Some 3,000 soldiers participated in the campaign.¹² In short, Sherman's strategy "called for a five-pronged pincer that would converge on the Texas Panhandle like spokes of a wagon wheel, sweeping the opposing

forces into the headwaters of the Red River at the hub.”¹³ J. T. Marshall, a Kansas newspaperman who served in the Red River War as a scout attached to Colonel Miles, wrote:

Nothing will bring them [the Indians] to terms and good behavior so speedily and effectively as an exhibition of the strength of the government and its power to crush them. A prolonged Indian war is not to be expected. When the Indians discover that the government is in earnest and determined to punish them, and that there is no possible chance of escape, they will be glad to sue for peace.¹⁴

In order to subjugate the Plains Indians, the Army rightly decided to use converging columns. Sherman believed there were no other good alternatives to achieve the end state that he wanted. They had to surround the Indians so they could not escape. As successful against the Comanche as Mackenzie had been up until that point, he still had failed to bring about a decisive battle with lasting results. Moreover, he simply lacked the amount of troops necessary to exhaust or coerce the Comanche into submission. A strategy of attrition was only as good as the size, support, and will of the US Army. Even though Mackenzie now had assistance to his north, east, and west, he knew his column had to succeed or the Red River campaign might fail. Mackenzie, left alone by Brigadier General Augur to plan as he saw fit, focused intensely on his responsibility in the campaign plan. Even though there was a War Department strategy, the lack of communication between army columns during this period meant that there was no guarantee that this campaign would be successful. This campaign would take a concerted effort on each commander’s part to hunt down the Indians and defeat them decisively.

The Army’s Red River campaign had more troops involved than normal, but the campaign was not easy. While this study focuses primarily on Mackenzie’s fight at the

Battle of Palo Duro Canyon, it is worth mentioning some of the other army columns' Red River War experiences. Colonel Nelson A. Miles wrote in his memoirs about the Red River War, emphasizing the harsh operational environment. Miles wrote that a severe drought occurred that year on the plains and that locusts were a problem during operations.¹⁵ Because of the severe drought and being some 200 miles from any base of supplies, Miles wrote that his soldiers sometimes had to open "the veins of their arms to moisten their burning lips."¹⁶ Miles also remembered in his memoirs how he approached Indian fighting during the Red River War. He codified his essential principles in the following statement:

Never, by day or night, to permit my command to be surprised; to hold it in such condition at all times, whether marching or camping, that it could be ever ready to encounter the enemy; to keep the divisions in communication and supporting distance of each other whenever possible and always ready to act on the offensive.¹⁷

On August 23, 1874, Mackenzie's "southern column" of 47 officers, 560 enlisted men, three acting assistant surgeons, and 32 scouts set out from Fort Concho, Texas, heading for the Red River. Mackenzie stayed behind at Fort Griffin with General Augur to finalize his plans and ensure that he had all of the supplies necessary to maximize the length of the campaign. Mackenzie sent most of his campaign ahead, demonstrating his faith in his men to prepare everything for his arrival. Once Mackenzie arrived, he would want to begin the search for the Indians immediately. The forward cavalry arrived at the Freshwater Fork where it established camp. The infantry and wagon trains arrived the following day. The camp busied itself drilling, preparing their equipment, and scouting the area for Indians. Mackenzie's intense training in between campaigns was paying dividends. His men were indeed prepared and ready when Mackenzie arrived.¹⁸

Augur must have been glad to have Mackenzie leading the southern arm of this massive operation. Mackenzie's familiarity with the Texas panhandle allowed Augur to give Mackenzie "free reign" to carry out this campaign.¹⁹ Even though Mackenzie's "southern column" was part of Sherman and Sheridan's broader encirclement plan, Mackenzie knew that he was still on his own and could not expect reinforcements. Operating independently was not a problem for Mackenzie. He had supreme confidence in his own abilities to find the Indians, bring them to battle, and deal them a crushing blow that would eventually end the Red River War.

Mackenzie and his small contingent finally arrived at the supply camp on September 19, 1874. This was the same supply camp he used to launch his Comanche campaigns in 1871 and 1872. This camp was different than most because, instead of wood walls, Mackenzie actually used the natural rock formations surrounding the camp as its defensive perimeter.²⁰ He immediately readied his command for another venture into the Staked Plains. During this expedition, Mackenzie had cavalry, infantry, and scouts at his disposal. He decided to organize his cavalry into two battalions of four companies each. Captain Napoleon B. McLaughlin was in charge of the first battalion. It included Companies D, F, I, and K. Captain Eugene B. Beaumont commanded the other battalion that contained Companies A, E, H, and L. Lieutenant William H. Thompson commanded the scouts.²¹ While a commander's abilities are no doubt important, successful battles often hinge on the commander's subordinate leadership. Mackenzie's junior officers during this campaign had served with him, and he knew their capabilities. Mackenzie certainly benefitted from young officers who not only had experience, but also knew Mackenzie's approaches to war.

As Mackenzie and his 4th Cavalry were about to depart, the other US Army columns were already having some success. Mile's civilian scout, J. T. Marshall, provided important eyewitness accounts. Marshall's descriptions are useful in better understanding what Mackenzie and his men were about to encounter. On September 4, 1874, Marshall fought against a combination of Cheyenne, Kiowa, and Comanche warriors on the Red River. At least 75 Indians "came over the hill, whooping, yelling and firing." About 30 US Army scouts "at once dismounted and commenced pouring lead into the charging redskins, and in a few minutes they were charging back with greater rapidity than they advanced." The Indians used spears, Spencer's, and needle guns, but exhibited poor execution. Marshall concluded that the Delaware Indian scouts performed well in the fight for the US, and the Gatling guns and ten-pound Parrott killed several Indians.²² Marshall expanded on another encounter a few days later.

The whole country is alive with Indians, and more troops will be needed to squelch them . . . the conduct of our men against such fearful odds deserves the highest praise. The Indians kept up a continuous fire for three days and nights, during which time no water or feed could be had, notwithstanding they were within a few hundred yards . . . they cannot be drawn into an open engagement with the troops, but will pick up isolated parties, make dashes on supply trains, and carry on a general guerrilla warfare, for which the country is admirably adapted.²³

The Comanche, Kiowa, and Cheyenne guerilla warfare tactics were not isolated to just Mackenzie's 4th Cavalry. All of Sheridan's Army columns faced fierce resistance as Miles and the rest of the contingents closed in on the desperate Indian tribes.

Leaving three infantry companies under the command of Major Thomas M. Anderson to guard the supply camp, Mackenzie's "southern column" embarked on the familiar roads the 4th Cavalry had traversed only a few years before. Early into the expedition, Mackenzie found his command already engaged with the Comanche. Some of

Mackenzie's advance scouts reported that 20 to 25 Comanche warriors had attacked them. Carter noted, "every precaution was taken against surprise, as we now knew the Indians having discovered us would be on the alert day and night."²⁴ Mackenzie sent Lieutenant George Albee from the 24th Infantry and some Seminoles to track the hostiles, but they were unable to find the Comanche trail. Once Lawton and the wagon supply train caught up, Mackenzie was not deterred. He ordered McLaughlin's First Battalion to pursue the Comanche and the rest of the column continued onward. Once again, Mackenzie left the supply train behind. It would have to catch up with the impatient Mackenzie.²⁵

As was often the case, US soldiers dealt with unfavorable weather conditions during warfare on the plains. Carter remarked about one storm in particular on the campaign. "It rained in torrents and the lightning was incessant and so vivid as to illuminate the entire bivouac. 'Sheets of flame' hardly does it justice."²⁶ Despite the torrential storm, Lawton moved his wagon trains through all of the mud and muck after five hours of "hard pulling through the soft, slushy mud."²⁷ This example showed again that one of Mackenzie's greatest assets was his quartermaster Lawton, and Lawton's ability to push through the harsh conditions. Mackenzie's method of campaigning was relentless, and Lawton masterfully kept pace, allowing Mackenzie to pursue at the speed he wanted. In spite of all the rain and mud, the 4th Cavalry persevered. Mackenzie's determination was about to be rewarded.

After enduring the previous night's storm, the morning of September 25 finally arrived, and Mackenzie led his cavalry out of their bivouac in search of their objective. They had not gone more than a day when some of the scouts spotted the enemy on the

column's periphery. The chance of an Indian attack was becoming more apparent. It was time to camp. Mackenzie took proper precautions to respond to an attack if it occurred. Mackenzie would not allow the Comanche to stampede his horses as they had on his previous campaigns.

Mackenzie's extra precautions were wise. Around 250 Indians charged the camp in an attempt to stampede the horses and kill soldiers in the process. Captain Beaumont's A Company stopped the main charge and this time the horses "were securely anchored."²⁸ When the Indians realized that their plan had failed, they circled Mackenzie's command, sporadically firing shots. The 4th Cavalry valiantly stood their ground and after several hours, the Indians left. The Comanche were not finished. Over 300 warriors appeared at daylight and began shooting. Because the Indians were still at a distance, the shots did not present any real danger to Mackenzie's command. Mackenzie wanted to charge at the pesky Indians. One of Mackenzie's leadership traits was to take the offensive when it made sense to do so. Carter recalled that as the troops charged, "the Indians had disappeared as completely as if the ground had swallowed them."²⁹ The Comanche were not going to make it easy for the 4th Cavalry, but Mackenzie did not give up easily and would keep after them.

When the 4th Cavalry finally halted again after traveling further up the Tule Canyon, they did not get far when Sergeant John B. Charlton and several Tonkawa scouts arrived and told Mackenzie about a "fresh trail."³⁰ Seizing the opportunity, Mackenzie mounted his troops and followed this new trail. One might argue that Mackenzie was reckless in this situation by not allowing his men to rest. One might ask—what would happen if his men who encountered the enemy were too tired to fight effectively and

pursue if necessary? Mackenzie was not reckless. He knew his troop's stamina and their ability to handle the strenuous situation. Most of Mackenzie's officers had been with him for several years, and they knew he would not jeopardize the mission on a rash decision.

Mackenzie and the 4th Cavalry were about to be rewarded for their determination and persistence. It was still dark when the regiment resumed their search, and the sun had just begun to rise over the horizon when the troops came upon a remarkable site. They found the precipice to Palo Duro Canyon. When the soldiers looked down, they saw approximately 200 tipis and hundreds of horses spread out along the stream that ran at the canyon's bottom. This large group of Indians consisted of a group of Kiowa led by Mamanti, a large group of Comanche led by Ohamatai, and a small band of Cheyenne led by Iron Shirt.³¹ Unbeknownst to Mackenzie and the 4th Cavalry, these Indians were in the canyon because they came here after clashing with Miles's column along the Washita River. This was probably what Sherman and Sheridan had in mind when they devised the converging columns plan. The columns would eventually find, fix, and surround the hostile Indians.

The Kiowa leader Mamanti was also a medicine man. He had mistakenly assured the Indian tribes that they were safe in this canyon. Because of the medicine man's promise, the Indians erected their tipis and settled in for the long winter. One can see why Mamanti made his promise. The Palo Duro Canyon is the second largest canyon in the United States, second only to the Grand Canyon in Arizona. Surely the bluecoats or any other enemy would not be able to discover these tribes or fight effectively in this canyon? Just as he did several times throughout the last few years, Mackenzie was about to lead his 4th Cavalry into areas the Indians believed to be unreachable.

Mackenzie saw his chance and did not waste any time in ordering his men to descend into the steep canyon to engage the unsuspecting Indians. Carter recalled that the troops had to dismount and lead their horses single file down the canyon, and with “men and horses slipping down the steepest places, [and] stumbling and sliding,” it was a “great mystery” how they were able to achieve such a feat.³² It took the troops nearly an hour to make their way to the bottom of the canyon, but they continued on, knowing that once at the bottom, they had to engage the Comanche immediately to keep the advantage of surprise. The first group of troops had almost descended the entire canyon when an Indian lookout spotted the regiment and attempted to get the rest of the tribes’ attention. A soldier killed the Indian but not before several other Kiowa realized what had happened. The Indian villages sought to escape the oncoming threat.

The scouts, led by Lieutenant Thompson, along with companies A and E, led by Captain Beaumont and Captain Boehm respectively, reached the bottom first. The troops quickly formed a battle line. Once assembled, the two companies and scouts charged toward the villages. As they reached the villages, most of the Indians had dropped everything and quickly fled toward the other side of the canyon and up the bluffs to get away from the 4th Cavalry. As the first element gave chase, Mackenzie and companies H and L also arrived at the canyon’s bottom. They formed a battle line and were positioned to help as needed. In the haste of their flight, the Indians left blankets, clothing, shields, weapons and numerous other utensils scattered throughout their campground. Mackenzie’s regiment might not be successful in catching all of the fleeing Indians, but this daring attack offered a great reward. The Indians would be without much of their worldly possessions. Mackenzie, however, wanted to maximize this opportunity and

deliver a crippling strike to the Comanche and any other Indians tribes who were unfortunate enough to be in his way.

Thompson's scouts caught several of the warriors and killed three of them. Beaumont's company pursued the ponies and captured a large herd. Mackenzie led the two companies through the canyon. As they neared Beaumont's men, some Indians opened with a deadly volley of fire from nearby high ground. As the bullets reigned down from above, the troops wheeled about and found good cover. The cover did not last long as the Indians changed positions and once again reengaged the soldiers. The cavalry troops dismounted and established a skirmish line across the canyon bottom. Captain Sebastian Gunther, believing they might be trapped and annihilated, ordered his men to charge the Indians and drive them off. Mackenzie's battlefield experience saved Gunther's men as Mackenzie realized that the Indians were in a position to decimate Gunther's men. Mackenzie ordered the troops not to charge. Carter remembered that "at a time when the fire was the hottest" Mackenzie reassured his men. "I brought you in" Mackenzie shouted, "I will take you out." Carter wrote that "most of the men did not question when he led, we knew we could depend on his care and guidance."³³

The Indian's fire eventually subsided, but Mackenzie knew that danger had not passed. The 4th Cavalry still had to destroy the Indian supplies and escape from the canyon. Anticipating that the Indians would try to attack the troops leaving the canyon, Mackenzie had companies D, I, and K, who were under McLaughlin's First Battalion, form a skirmish line and drive away any Indians that might attack the regiment. This decision was exactly right as an Indian party advanced toward the troops on the sides of the canyon, using rocks and trees as concealment. After long-range fire and an advance

against the Indians, the troops eventually drove the Indians away. Exhausted but undeterred, Mackenzie knew they had to corral the captured ponies and ascend the canyon.

While companies D, I, and K engaged against the last remnants, one element of soldiers finished gathering all of the Indians supplies, setting them ablaze. Another group gathered all of the Indian's ponies and brought them to the top of the canyon. While most of the Indians escaped, they had to leave almost everything behind. The 4th Cavalry had to destroy everything so the Indians could not return and reclaim their possessions. With winter approaching, the Comanche and other tribes were now in a difficult position to survive without their tipis and supplies. After Mackenzie's regiment reassembled at the top of the canyon, the challenge now was transporting the 1,500 to 2,000 captured horses back to the 4th Cavalry's supply train. Mackenzie positioned his cavalry companies around the horse-herd because he knew from his previous experiences in 1871 and 1872 that the Comanche would try to recapture their ponies.

The regiment returned without incident. The only pestering the 4th Cavalry troops received on the way back to camp was from Mackenzie. Even Sergeant Charlton, who had fought valiantly with the regiment at the Battles of Blanco Canyon and McClellan's Creek, could not stay awake. It had been several days since Charlton and the scouts slept, but when Charlton dozed off in his saddle; Mackenzie was right next to him, tapping him on the shoulder, and telling him to see to his men and horses.³⁴ Exhausted and hungry from the events over the past few days, the troops arrived and quickly ate their breakfast and enjoyed some much-needed rest. Carter recalled, "in view of what we had gone through—thirty-four hours in the saddle, riding over seventy miles, and having two or

three hours fighting and hard work generally, that same Mother Earth was as welcome as any soft feather bed.”³⁵

Mackenzie understood the horse’s significance to Comanche survival, and the extreme difficulty of continuing his campaign while guarding the enormous herd of captures ponies. Carter wrote that “experience had been our lesson” and knowing that the Comanche would be persistent at trying to recapture their horses, Mackenzie let the Tonkawa scouts select the best horses, and then ordered the rest shot.³⁶ The job of destroying the animals fell to Lieutenant Lawton. As fast as the troops could round up the horses, firing squads shot the animals, leaving a pile of carcasses so large that the bones from the horses remained for years, a macabre testament to the battle’s results.³⁷

The casualty numbers at the Battle of Palo Duro Canyon were not high, but the battle remains an important event in the Red River War, especially in the multi-year fight against the Comanche. Because of the Comanche’s loss of their village and all of their winter food supplies, their will was broken and the bands slowly made their way to the Indian Territory. The last Comanche holdout was a group of Quahadi led by Quanah Parker who was not in the Palo Duro Canyon area. In April 1875, Mackenzie sent Dr. Jacob J. Sturm to negotiate with Parker. Sturm and his contingent tracked down the Comanche and were treated kindly. Dr. Sturm wrote in his journal, “I never shall forget the treatment I have had from these untutored savages . . . I hope General McKenzie [sic] will not think our move too slow as a great many of the families have poor horses and we have to go slow on that account.”³⁸ In a rather fitting observation, Dr. Sturm was more concerned about Mackenzie’s wrath than anything the Comanche might do to him. Even the fiercest Comanche warriors finally surrendered to their new way of life awaiting them

on the reservation. Mackenzie's tour on the American frontier was not over, but in many ways this battle served as a culminating event for him. After several years of campaigning, he learned Comanche tactics, familiarized himself with the terrain, and realized that a relentless campaign on Comanche territory was the only way to subdue the Comanche. Mackenzie was a tireless leader who constantly demanded the most from his men, and his men always came through for him when it mattered the most.

¹ Richard A. Thompson, *Crossing the Border with the 4th Cavalry: Mackenzie's Raid into Mexico—1873* (Waco: Texian Press, 1986), xv-xvii.

² Wallace, *Ranald S. Mackenzie on the Texas Frontier*, 104.

³ James A. Crutchfield, ed., *The Way West: True Stories of the American Frontier* (New York: Forge Books, 2006), 240.

⁴ J. Brett Cruse, *Battles of the Red River War: Archeological Perspectives on the Indian Campaign of 1874* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2008), 14.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Wallace, *Ranald S. Mackenzie on the Texas Frontier*, 118.

⁷ Cruse, 15.

⁸ Mayhall, 1.

⁹ Cruse, 15.

¹⁰ Mayhall, 14-15.

¹¹ William Leckie, ed. *Indian Wars of the Red River Valley* (Newcastle, CA: Sierra Oaks Publishing Company, 1987), prologue, 2.

¹² Cruse, 18.

¹³ Bill Yenne, *Indian Wars: The Campaign for the American West* (Yardley, PA: Westholme Publishing, 2006), 164.

¹⁴ J. T. Marshall, *The Miles Expedition of 1874-1875: An Eyewitness Account of the Red River War*, ed. Lonnie J. White (Austin: The Encino Press, 1971), 29.

¹⁵ Nelson A. Miles, *Serving the Republic: Memoirs of the Civil and Military Life of Nelson A. Miles, Lieutenant General, United States Army* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1911), 123.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 125.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 122.

¹⁸ Wallace, *Ranald S. Mackenzie on the Texas Frontier*, 129-130.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 130.

²⁰ Wayne Parker, "COL Ranald Mackenzie's Supply Camp in Blanco Canyon," *Central States Archaeological Journal* 26, no. 4 (1979): 181.

²¹ Cruse, 105.

²² Marshall, 16-17.

²³ *Ibid.*, 20-21.

²⁴ Carter, 482.

²⁵ Wallace, *Ranald S. Mackenzie on the Texas Frontier*, 133.

²⁶ Carter, 483.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 486.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 487.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 488. John B. Charlton wrote his memoirs in a series of letters to Robert G. Carter who collected them, edited them, and published them in 1926 called *The Old Sergeant's Story: Winning the West from the Indians and Bad Men in 1870 to 1876*.

³¹ Wallace, *Ranald S. Mackenzie on the Texas Frontier*, 139.

³² Carter, 488-489.

³³ *Ibid.*, 491.

³⁴ J' Nell L. Pate, "The Red River War of 1874: An Enlisted Man's Contribution," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 54, no. 2 (June 1976): 271.

³⁵ Carter, 494.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Wallace, *Ranald S. Mackenzie on the Texas Frontier*, 145.

³⁸ Ernest Wallace, “The Journal of Ranald S. Mackenzie’s Messenger to the Kwahadi Comanches,” *Red River Valley Historical Review* 3, no. 2 (1978): 241.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The regiment is the family. The colonel, as the father, should have a personal acquaintance with every officer and man, and should instill a feeling of pride and affection for himself, so that his officers and men would naturally look to him for personal advice and instruction.¹

— William Tecumseh Sherman, *Memoirs of General W. T. Sherman*

General Sherman wrote these words in his memoirs about the importance of the regiment and the commander's actions towards his men. The outcome of the American Indian Wars, like other conflicts in which the US Army has participated, hinged to a large degree on the leadership of those far-flung frontier regiments. As discussed throughout this study, the Texas frontier was a place where the Comanche, the "Lords of the Southern Plains," reigned supreme for hundreds of years. The Comanche are arguably the most fierce and brutal Indian tribe in American history. The Texas frontier was one of the harshest and most inhospitable terrains that the US Army faced during the American Indian Wars. In order to be successful in this most difficult of terrain against this most ferocious of enemies, the US Army, first and foremost, had to have the right leadership in place to somehow secure victory against difficult odds. Colonel Ranald Slidell Mackenzie of the 4th United States Cavalry became that leader. His persistence, bravery, "indomitable will," and ability to strike with surprise in the Comanche homelands compelled the Comanche to finally surrender once and for all.

Before summarizing the leadership traits and a few other factors that enabled Mackenzie to be successful, it is worth noting that Mackenzie was far from a perfect leader. Some historians argue that, in view of General Sherman's regard for a regimental

commander's conduct, Mackenzie did not have the "personal acquaintance with every officer and man" that he should have had. In fact, practically every historian that has written about Mackenzie acknowledges that he was moody, irritable, and often harsh in the handling of his men.

Another of Mackenzie's weaknesses was his sometimes slow ability to learn from his past mistakes, in particular, when the Comanche were able to stampede or recapture their horses after the Battles of Blanco Canyon and McClellan's Creek. Probably no one will ever know the complete reason why he failed to establish better security, but the important thing to note is what Mackenzie did after those incidents occurred. Mackenzie bounced back from those incidents and remained resilient; he did not allow tactical failures to derail his primary objective of finding and defeating the Comanche.

When historians list the US Army's great military minds and leaders during the period after the Civil War, Mackenzie's name does not usually appear. Part of the reason for this is due to Mackenzie's early death and the way in which he died. After his time taming the Texas frontier ended, Mackenzie spent another eight years on the American frontier campaigning against numerous Indian tribes. But by 1882, Mackenzie's physical and mental state had degraded quite severely, and he began to show signs of strange behavior. Recognizing Mackenzie's deteriorating condition, the Army convened a board and Mackenzie retired from the Army on March 24, 1884. Up until the end, Mackenzie was characteristically stubborn and hard-willed: "You all know me, and have known me a great many years, and I think it very harsh if I am left out of the Army where my services have always been gallant and honest and faithful, and for a few months

sickness.”² Mackenzie finally succumbed to “general paresis of the insane” and died in Staten Island, New York on January 19, 1889.³

By dying at an early age, Mackenzie did not have the opportunity to promote his own legacy. And by not dying in a heroic last stand, a la George A. Custer at the Battle of the Little Bighorn, Mackenzie did not have the opportunity for myths and legends to be built upon around a “heroic” last stand. But perhaps Mackenzie did not want it that way and would have been mad if he was compared to Custer. As Charles M. Robinson III wrote, “Custer played for history; Mackenzie played for results . . . glamour and glory were the hallmarks of Custer’s Seventh; victory and survival were the hallmarks of Mackenzie’s Fourth.”⁴

Another reason historians do not mention Mackenzie alongside other famous military minds, such as Emory Upton, Philip St George Pierre Cooke, or even William T. Sherman or Philip H. Sheridan is because he did not use any “revolutionary” tactics to defeat the Comanche. Upon graduation from West Point, Mackenzie entered the Civil War. During the war, he employed the military tactics that made him successful. He led from the front, displayed bravery, remained persistence, and used disciplined and trained troops to accomplish his mission. Mackenzie retained these characteristics and “lessons learned” from the Civil War and applied them against the Comanche in Texas.

The fact that Mackenzie used the same leadership style during the Civil War that he did during the American Indian Wars demonstrates that, while it is important to view each conflict and enemy on their own merits, US Army leaders must not abandon the basic leadership principles of courage, discipline, and selfless service. These military principles are timeless. This does not mean that Mackenzie used every tactic against the

Comanche that he used against the Confederate Army during the Civil War. In fact, Mackenzie demonstrated a great ability to adapt to the operational environment and use assets, such as the Tonkawa scouts, to his advantage in overcoming potentially catastrophic challenges. S. C. Gwynn concludes that without the Tonkawa “the army would never have had the shadow of a chance against these [Comanche] or any Indians on the open plains.”⁵ Through speed, surprise, and mobility, Mackenzie in many ways fought like the Comanche.

For all of Mackenzie’s faults, his leadership ability and his decisions demonstrate that his presence on the Texas frontier was one of the most important factors in securing a relatively peaceful future for the settlers on the southern plains. One of the most important aspects regarding Mackenzie’s success was his penchant for properly estimating his enemy. Even though Mackenzie did not know everything about the Comanche and went through some “growing pains” during the Battles of Blanco Canyon and McClellan’s Creek, he never put his regiment in a position where they would be defeated. As discussed several times throughout the study, Mackenzie shows proper caution and restraint in his pursuit of the Comanche. Until he knew he could catch the Comanche in a vulnerable situation, he would not risk his regiment’s ability to use speed and surprise to deliver a devastating strike.

While not perfect, Mackenzie planned appropriately for his campaigns and he got the most out of his men. The 4th Cavalry was filled with Civil War veterans (Beaumont, McLaughlin, and Lawton to name a few) and soldiers who had no Civil War experience. Regardless of their experience, Mackenzie left little to chance and took the time to drill, instill discipline, and ensure that his regiment was as prepared as possible to face the

unknown. Mackenzie was certainly fortunate to have competent and resourceful officers in his command. These men, such as Carter, Lawton, Beaumont, and McLaughlin, certainly are significant factors in Mackenzie's success. Noted counterinsurgency expert, Andrew Birtle, observes that the Army had "a deep appreciation for the value of mobility; a rich heritage of small-unit leadership that stressed self-reliance; aggressive, independent action and open order tactics."⁶ Mackenzie and his company commanders exhibited these necessary traits of self-reliance, aggressiveness, and independent mindsets that Birtle describes.

This study does not delve too deeply into the lives of Mackenzie's subordinates. Further research into the individual lives of the 4th Cavalry's remarkable officers and soldiers under Mackenzie's command would be a worthwhile endeavor and add tremendous depth to the historiography of the American Indian Wars. Another area of further research that would prove beneficial to understanding Mackenzie and the Indian Wars in Texas would be Mackenzie's actions when he first arrived in Texas. Mackenzie's time as the 41st Infantry Regiment Commander was a pivotal, but often overlooked, time in his career.

Besides Mackenzie's leadership and his officer's abilities, the other significant factor was Mackenzie's superiors and their willingness to keep him on the Texas plains. This longevity proved significant in explaining his success in Texas. Today's Army still is very much a result-oriented institution. The US Army during the Indian Wars possessed the same attitude. Mackenzie used his 4th Cavalry effectively to achieve the desired results. One must bear in mind, however, that these outcomes did not happen overnight; General Sherman and other senior leaders deserve credit for keeping

Mackenzie in the field until he accomplished the mission. Even though he was unable to inflict a decisive defeat that ended all hostilities during his campaigns from 1871 to 1873, Mackenzie always achieved something. He acquired additional intelligence about the land and gained insight into Comanche tactics that would serve him well in later engagements. Moreover, Mackenzie did not rely on his reputation from the Civil War to seek greater glory. While this reputation probably helped, Mackenzie demonstrated his leadership abilities from the very beginning when he accepted command of the black 41st Infantry Regiment. Mackenzie took an infantry regiment that was not supposed to be very good and made it one of the best, most-disciplined regiments in Texas, if not the Army.

There is no question that the Comanche were a formidable foe for Mackenzie and the 4th Cavalry. The Comanche were experts in guerilla warfare and used those skills to their advantage. Two of the best ways for any army to defeat an enemy that engages in guerilla warfare is to strike them in their safe haven and to possess the will, determination, and perseverance to go after them until they surrender, or no longer pose a security threat. The fact that Mackenzie possessed the determination, perseverance, and will to find, attack, and pursue the Comanche after all of the wounds he had sustained during the Civil War is nothing short of remarkable.

All US Army officers, but especially officers at the company and field grade levels, would be wise to study and explore Mackenzie's time on the Texas frontier. Mackenzie's stint in Texas would serve as excellent case studies in leadership, tactics, asymmetric or guerilla warfare, and numerous other military subjects. The American Indian Wars are often overlooked when US Army officers study past military events. With the types of conflicts that the US military continues to be engaged in, the American

Indian Wars provide a wealth of insight that would be beneficial to anyone who takes the time to study this fascinating period in American military history.

In the long line of famous Indian fighters, one might ask where Ranald S. Mackenzie, “the Fighting Colonel,” falls on the list of the best? While those debates can often be fun, ranking him on such a list would not provide additional insights for the purposes of this study. However, it is rather clear that there is a famous Indian fighter that Mackenzie did not resemble—George Armstrong Custer. The Indian fighter who Mackenzie shared many similar traits was General George Crook. Captain John G. Bourke, who served on Crook’s staff from 1870 to 1886, describes Crook this way. Crooke’s “whole idea of life was to do each duty well, and to let his work speak for itself . . . whenever there was a trouble of any magnitude under Crook’s jurisdiction he started at once to the point nearest the skirmish line, and stayed there so long as the danger existed; but he did it all so quietly, and with so little parade.”⁷ Like Crook, Mackenzie endeavored to do every task given him, no matter how menial, to the best of his ability. Mackenzie also preferred to have his actions speak for himself. He had neither the time nor the interest to construct his own legend. For Mackenzie, there was always too much to do.

In sum, Ranald Slidell Mackenzie has a remarkable legacy. After Mackenzie’s raid into Mexico in 1873 to punish the Kickapoo Indians, the Texas Legislature approved a resolution thanking Mackenzie and the 4th Cavalry for their service. It proclaimed in part “that the grateful thanks of the people of the State and particularly the Citizens of our Frontier are due to General McKenzie [sic] and the officers and troops under his command for their prompt action and gallant conduct in inflicting well merited

punishment upon these scourges of our frontier.”⁸ This resolution came after the Remolino Raid, but it sums up Mackenzie’s entire time on the Texas frontier. At the end of his memoirs, Robert G. Carter probably summarizes Mackenzie the best. “While he was strict and exacting, sometimes irritable or irascible, he was never tyrannical or unjust. Firmness and justice were his ruling characteristics. He wanted results—things accomplished.”⁹

¹ William Tecumseh Sherman, *Memoirs of W. T. Sherman* (New York: Penguin Books, 2000), 739-740.

² Wallace, *Ranald S. Mackenzie on the Texas Frontier*, 193.

³ Soren W. Nielsen, “Ranald. S. Mackenzie: The Man and His Battle,” *West Texas Historical Association Yearbook*, 64 (January 1988): 151.

⁴ Robinson, *Bad Hand*, xvi-xvii.

⁵ S. C. Gwynne, *Empire of the Summer Moon: Quanah Parker and the Rise and Fall of the Comanches, the Most Powerful Indian Tribe in American History* (New York: Scribner, 2010), 7.

⁶ Birtle, 87.

⁷ John G. Bourke, *On the Border with Crook* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1971), 108-109.

⁸ Robinson, *Bad Hand*, 153-154.

⁹ Carter, 537.

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